The LAVENDER LAD



By Dolf Wyllarde



Class F63
Book .W978
L 2
Copy 2.

THE LAVENDER LAD



The LAVENDER LAD

By DOLF WYLLARDE

With a frontispiece in full color
from a painting by

J. S. ELAND

BOSTON
THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street
MDCCCCXXIII

Copy 2

PZ 3
.W978
La
2
Copy 2

Copyright, 1923, by
L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
(INCORPORATED)

All rights reserved

Made in U. S. A.

First Impression, July, 1923

Transferred from
Copyright Office
1924

PRINTED BY C. H. SIMONDS COMPANY
BOSTON, MASS., U. S. A.

AUG 27 '23

FOREWORD

THE tune of "Buoy my Lavender" is familiar to all London, and belongs to its historical street-cries. The words vary, but I have written them as I best remember hearing them, as a child. The tune of "Lavender's Blue" is my own, as I knew of no setting that would suit me; but I am indebted for the accompaniment to Mr. Reginald Yarrow.

DOLF WYLLARDE.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE COMING OF THE BOY	9
II.	JOHN DAISH OF LEITH	32
III.	LAVENDER HARVEST	53
IV.	THE BEAUTIFUL LADY	70
V.	WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DISTILLERY	87
VI.	A STRANGER LEANS OVER THE GATE	100
VII.	BREATH OF EVIL	122
VIII.	TELLING THE BEES	147
IX.	THE BOY AT BAY	165
X.	KISMET—IT IS DESTINY	174
XI.	THE DROWNING LADY	197
XII.	THE CRACK OF DOOM	210
XIII.	THE GOING OF THE BOY	227
XIV.	AT MIDNIGHT	237
XV.	"LAVENDER'S BLUE!"	249
XVI.	PEACE	264

THE LAVENDER LAD

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE BOY

HALF-past seven on a July morning is not a bad time to be out of doors, provided the day is fair. The clock, it is true, said half-past eight, but it being "summer time" the sun was cheated of an hour, and indignantly denied the fact that he ought to have been shining with more strength, by touching the tips of the sleeping trees and the dew-laden fields with cool golden fingers.

It was rather chilly going through the Surrey lanes, though the great cart-horses found it warm enough even with the empty van behind them, and did not hurry themselves on the homeward way. They had turned out at four o'clock yesterday afternoon to take the sweet load of lavender to London, had stood meekly outside the retailers' to be unloaded, and had munched their breakfast in the dawn while the bunches were sent on into Covent Garden. They did not actually take their produce into the market, but they had been near-by, and the homeward route was taken soberly—sixteen good miles both ways, and thirty-two in all.

The two men in the cart had been up all night also, and nodded every now and then, pulling up with a jerk to admonish the blameless horses, or to pass a remark to each other as if they had never been asleep.

"Git on, Em'rald! Now then, Ruby!—It's going to be warmish, Bill!"

"It may be anything it likes as soon as I turn into bed for a nap, Jonah! I'd have slep' the way down from Croydon if it hadn't been for the bloomin' baskets. The load 'ud be in the road before now but for me, they're so badly packed."

He gave a vicious prod at the pile of bushel baskets that wobbled ominously, and kicked aside the corner of the "archangel" mats which had covered the lavender and lay at the back of the van. As he did so he rubbed his eyes and edged nearer to the driver.

"Jonah, did you see anything alive in the van when we left London?"

"Nothing but fleas, if that's what you're after," said Jonah ironically. "Always plenty of them to be got in the Market, and worse still!"

"I've thought all the way down as there was something moving under the mats—a stray dog or a fowl."

"Why don't you look then, and find out?" said the driver, yawning, as he swung his horses down the Leith road. "Cl-ck, Ruby!—Git along, Em'rald."

"I'm not fond o' strange dogs," said Bill, with a distrustful glance at the pile of coarse matting heaped into a mound near its centre. "He might turn on me if disturbed. I'll wait till we git in, and Hector will send him about his biz dam' quick."

Jonah nodded sleepily, too tired to assert himself

as usual or to tell his companion that he was a funk. Bill was rather timid with animals, as he knew, and the men on the farm who had to do with the cattle and horses looked upon him as a poor thing—good for the lavender and nothing else. Nevertheless he was one of the best cutters and binders at Leith, and his master could better have parted with a dozen good teamsters.

Emerald and Ruby quickened their pace and broke into a rough trot as the gate of their own farm appeared in a turning of the road. The jolting of the empty van was uncomfortable even for the men, and Bill cast a suspicious eye at the heap of mats. It seemed to him that it moved more than the pace warranted, as though something beneath tried to steady itself. He had to drop off the van a minute later, however, to open the gate for the impatient horses, and Jonah took them at a handsome trot up to the farm while his mate walked on more slowly behind.

When they arrived at the stables the team would hardly stand for all Jonah's "wooaing" and scolding, so eager were they for their stalls. It seemed as if they were going to take their lightened vehicle in with them, and Jonah swung himself down from his seat and took hold of their heads roughly, jerking at the bits for punishment and causing a commotion of trampling and ringing chains that brought his master out, as he certainly did not intend.

"Let their heads alone, man—don't jab them like that!" said John Daish imperatively; and before the vexed driver could recover either his temper or his

self-possession, he found himself put on one side, and the fretting horses were being soothed and steadied at the same time by a stronger hand on their reins.

"The —— beasts tried to bolt for their stalls!" muttered Jonah, angry with himself for his exhibition of temper and the horses for their disobedience.

"You know what the rule is on this farm about the teams," said Daish, with no lack of decision in his manner, though he spoke without heat. "If you can't keep your temper with them you must try other work. You are pretty tired, I expect. Go and get your breakfast before you turn in. Where's Bill Somers?"

"Coming along behind," said Jonah sulkily. He omitted the "sir" which he owed to his master, on purpose, with the sullen defiance of a child; but John Daish took no notice at the minute. He could handle men with as much judgment as horses.

The altercation about the team had kept the attention of both master and man off the van, and neither of them had noticed anything fall or slip out of it. But when Bill arrived on the scene a minute later, he stared at the heap of archangel mats and a bushel basket that had fallen to the ground over the tail-board.

"Jonah, did you see anything o' that dog?" he asked sharply.

"What dog?" growled the driver, turning on his heel towards the men's cottages at the back of the farmhouse. "You're a —— fool, Bill. Might 'ave bin on the drink, seeing dogs that ain' there."

"Well, it's gone now, I grant yer. Must have

slipped out and knocked over one of the baskets when yer weren't looking. And yer needn't be so ratty, anyway."

Bill, not having been witness of Jonah's discomfiture, was injured at his companion's ill-temper, for Jonah, replying nothing, stumped off to get his breakfast from his wife and go to bed, leaving his master to stable the team if he would. John Daish, leading Emerald to his stall, paused at the stable door and looked back at Bill Somers.

"What dog was that, Somers?"

"I thought as there was something alive in the van, sir, under the mats. A stray dog or a fowl, crept in while we was at Mr. Biram's. It's gone now, right enough." He turned over the mats, which had certainly collapsed from their former position, and showed that they had nothing to conceal.

"Possibly it was when the horses plunged that the mats were shaken together and the basket fell," said Daish. "Go and get your breakfast like Jonah. I will see to the horses."

He stabled the good beasts himself, grooming them with as practised a hand as any of his men, and having fed and watered them left them munching in a happy peace. As he came out of the stable the day had advanced another hour from the moment when Bill first spoke of the supposititious dog, and the sun was really beginning to promise warmth later on. John Daish stood in the doorway a minute, looking out across the yard to the row of cowhouses opposite, and further off to the pond and the great barn that held the machinery for distilling the lavender which was

the chief cultivation on his farm. His face in the morning sunlight had the grave beauty and serenity of a Greek statue, though his features were too massive and of a different type to the Greek. Only in the line of the head and neck, and the very thick rippling hair, was there a suggestion of the Hermes or the Disc-thrower, and his colouring was entirely Anglo-Saxon, —hair the colour of ripe corn, not golden so much as gold burnt into brown, eyes deeply blue like the sea rather than the sky, and a skin that was tanned and ruddy together. He was a tall man and loosely made, his whole body supple with the open-air life that he led and the hard labour in the fields, for he was a working farmer and no gentleman farming his land for pastime as well as for profit. His entire unconsciousness of his own personal beauty was the result of habit rather than ignorance. A man cannot be ignorant who reads admiration in every pair of eyes, man's or woman's, that looks upon him; but he need not necessarily be vain.

He turned aside from the stables, and crossing the driving road to the farmhouse entered the distillery. If some strange dog had got in and hidden himself in the dusk of the place there would be a fresh commotion when his own house-dog, Hector, discovered him, and Daish wished to save the poor creature from a fight which must certainly end in disabling, if not killing, him. Hector's breed was uncertain, but his fighting qualities were not. There was probably a strain of the bull in him, certainly of the mastiff. He was as morose and surly as Jonah Wickham, but he loved his master with a whole-hearted affection

that added jealousy to his other vices. Hector was a one-man dog, and no pet of the farm-hands; but he was an excellent guard on a lonely farm, and the fear of him had gone abroad into miles of country round about.

The great barn had originally been built for the storing of grain, and even now one end of it was walled in like a pit for the lavender if the crop was unusually heavy. As a rule there was no more than could be worked from day to day at distilling time, or rather through day and night, for once the distilling began it could not stop until the precious oil was all extracted. On the floor of the building stood the great boiler rising up through the staging into the darkness above, and the condensers which took the place of the old-fashioned vat. John Daish had come into the farm as a young man, with modern notions, and had replaced the former methods of distilling with simplified machinery which was yet so new as to be a startling innovation amongst the lavender-growers, and was looked upon with distrust by less enterprising men. He would not lightly forget those days and nights when the new plant was tried for the first time, and the great boiler nearly cooked those who must needs work in its vicinity because it was not yet lagged—or what is called "jacketed" in a marine engine. After the initial outlay and anxiety the new methods had more than justified their trial, both in easier work and safety for the men. There was an inward satisfaction in John's heart whenever he stood among those small, nimble condensers and remembered the clumsy contrivances of a former day. The men

were proud of the machinery now, and kept it in good condition even through the idle winter, so that it needed very little cleaning before he wanted to start work in August.

The distillery was always a dusky place, for he had no gas or electric plant of his own. On the upper floor, where the coppers were fed with the lavender, and the waste afterwards ejected, the work was lighted by great wooden doors that opened outwards and admitted light and air ; and at night by strong American lamps. When the copper was not at work it was covered with a hood which was bolted down to the rim, and round the edge of this hood was a water seal which prevented the steam from escaping. The hoods were on now, the machinery at rest, and the wooden doors closed. But there was little hiding-place for a dog, even in the gloom, and after a cursory glance from the wooden stair, Daish descended again, wondering if the animal had got round the cold boiler or behind a heap of coke with which it was fed. The only other sanctuary it could have found was in the storage pit, and he walked over to the low brick wall, remembering that, the lavender crop being light this summer, he had utilised the pit to store some fodder for the horses. There were a few sacks of grain down there, and two or three trusses of hay, one of which had been partly used. He went down two brick steps into the pit and shifted some of the loose hay, expecting that any animal, if disturbed, would make a bolt of it and rush past him rather than burrow deeper into its hiding-place.

Suddenly he gave a sharp exclamation, almost like

an oath—"My God!" His hand, groping in the darkness, had closed on the shoulder-blade of something human rather than the hairy coat of an animal, and he felt a coarse fabric, like unbleached calico, in his fingers. The thing, whatever it was, did not struggle, and he dragged it out of its nest in the hay, evidently roused from such a deep sleep that it was hardly awake even now. The growing sunlight, coming in more freely at this end of the barn, showed him that he held a slight and skinny boy by the arm, ragged and dirty and so ill-nourished in appearance that it was impossible to guess his age. The intruder flung the other arm up instinctively as if to ward off a blow, and Daish almost let go his hold in the reproof which the action dealt him.

"What are you doing here, boy?" he said, more gently than he might have spoken save for that betraying movement.

The child—he was hardly more in stature, at least—looked up with a pair of eyes so dark as to seem black, but full of a fierce cunning. His hair was dark also and made his head nothing but a round black ball over a pinched wedge of a face, colourless save for the dark eyes.

"I come out in yer cart," he said glibly, and then, his voice rising to a practised whine, "I'm so tired I fell asleep in 'ere so's the men shouldn't turn me out. Let me stop, guv'nor. I ain't doing no 'arm."

"You can't stop here," said John Daish firmly. "I've got a great dog who would drive you out if he found you, and might half kill you. What made you come down in the van?"

"I wanted to get out of London—I've bin nearly took to quod for 'wanderin'' two or three times. I tried to sleep in the Market last night, but you don't get 'alf a chance since they done away with the Arches. Leaden'all's better, but they know me too well round there. I ain't 'ad no sleep for two or three nights." He yawned in Daish's face, showing that his teeth at least were as white and sharp as a little wolf's. "I made my lucky inter your cart 'cos it smelt ser precious good!"

The raw Cockney accent made Daish almost shrink, and the expression in the bright eyes, which were becoming more wakeful and calculating every minute. He looked down at this waif of humanity spewed up by the sea of London at his threshold, and felt unusually helpless and undecided. It seemed a case for the Barnado Homes rather than rescue work out here in the country; but he did not know how to get the boy back to London on the instant, and in the meantime he could not turn him adrift any more than he would have done the stray dog, though he sought to save it from Hector.

"Do you belong to London, boy? You know nothing much of the country, I suppose?"

"Lord love yer, yes! I bin on the tramp most of my life. Born in a gipsy camp, and eddicated by a one-eyed pedlar who swore awful, guv'nor! It was spoiling my morals, so I 'ad to leave 'im." He shook his round black head with an air of pious hypocrisy that was inimitable, and despite his rags and his dirt and his emaciation, Daish felt that the Father of Lies had more probably sired this imp of wickedness than any gipsy, rogue though he might be.

"Did you want work on the farm then?" he said more curtly. "What can you do?"

"Dunno yet," said the boy with one of his too-quick glances out of the shrewd eyes. "What's your farm?"

"Lavender mostly. What you smelt in the van. We send it up to market in flower this month, and next we shall distil it for the oil—the scent that you see in bottles in the shops." He found it difficult to explain a "luxury trade" to this small, starved creature.

But the boy's face brightened with a comprehension that was uglier than ignorance.

"What the girls uses to make 'emselves sweet!" he said, sticking his tongue into his lean cheek. "Lord love yer! I know. Seen 'em round the Garden often 'nough. Yer can smell 'em a mile off!"

Daish drew back with a feeling of repulsion. "Never mind—that's not what I meant," he said. "Would you like to see it growing?"

"Right-o!" said the imp, and turned to follow his leader, swinging himself up over the brick wall with an ease that at least promised much for his agility. They crossed the road together, a strange pair in the morning sunshine, and walked across a piece of rough grass where chickens were straying, to a rail with a gate that let them through to sloping land beyond.

The ground immediately in front of them rose in a gradual sweep that rounded to the left and showed them nothing but an excellent crop of potatoes. Daish walked along the level, skirting the patch, the

boy following him, and then as they passed the bend it seemed as if the world were suddenly clothed in blue smoke. For the lavender was planted in straight lines that ran uphill to the sky, with a space of half a yard or so between the bushes where a man might walk; but the branches spread generously and filled the picture as the lines ran together in perspective, and the colour was not the dull mauve grey of the faded bunches sold in the streets or for scent bags, but the flowers being fully out it glowed into something that was almost purple at its deepest—blue at its faintest. Over the rippling heads hung a cloud of insects already, as if the precious scent and honey must be garnered with every minute of the day—white butterflies, small winged things too minute to classify, and the great wild bees as well as the legitimate denizens of the hive. These droned at their work with a murmur that seemed the audible joy of the summer morning, and as the wind bent the lavender it tossed perfume into the untainted air.

The boy stopped short with an intake of the breath more expressive than any exclamation. Daish looked down at the round black head half curiously, and saw the black eyes expand and soften as if with tears. For the moment the alteration of the little pinched face was extraordinary, and even his voice was softened so that it lost its raw Cockney twang and sounded like some creature suddenly elevated.

"Oh, but this is——" he began; and then his face narrowed again in its cunning as if a blight fell on it, and he stuck his tongue in his hollow cheek with repulsive humour.

"Lummy! don't yer just feel as if yer could eat it!" he said.

Daish turned his eyes away from the sharpened face, irritatingly disappointed. For the moment he had almost fancied he saw the soul in that stunted body, and now found nothing but a warped mind. But the boy thrust his hands into the pockets of his ragged knickerbockers, and tilted a comically determined chin in the air, by no means repelled by the man's disgust.

"Look 'ere, I'm going to stay," he said. "I'm going to stay with that!" He waved a dirty hand at the fields of coloured sweetness, and again for the moment that ennobling look came upon his face and made Daish hesitate.

"I don't want a boy on the farm—unless he knows something of the work and can make himself useful."

"You could learn me," said the boy, with infinite self-confidence. "You could learn me anythink. Quick as a tyke I am."

The boast almost made John Daish smile, for there was something of the terrier in this quick, cunning little arab of the streets and roads—the "lost dog" type that fends and steals for itself.

"Well, what's your name, lad?" he said, not unkindly.

"Charley."

"Any other name?"

"Don't know of any. They calls me the Prig in the Garden, 'cos yer can guess why!"

"You'll have to stop that on the farm," said Daish

promptly. "The first theft, and off you go. What's your age?"

"What yer please. I'm over fourteen or I'd 'ave to go to school. Making my own living I am, and keepin' my pore old grannie!" He winked as if at a phantom school inspector. "They let me off, 'cos they jolly well can't 'elp it—us 'vagrants' of the road is 'ard to cotch!"

"You don't look more than twelve," said Daish doubtfully, but as the boy stood beside him he judged that he might really be fourteen or even fifteen, allowing for a frame that had been half-starved, and undeveloped bones and muscles. Probably the boy did not himself know his real age if, as he said, he had been a nameless tramp all his life, and the school authorities might be less likely to object if he were doing steady work.

"If I gave you a trial and trained you as a little 'lavender lad,' would you work?" he asked, half ashamed of the kindly impulse that seemed like sheer folly in taking in this scum of the London streets or the highways. For Daish had few boys at Leith save at harvest time. Even the sons of his own labourers went to other farms where the work was more usual and would give them a better training in stock and agriculture.

"I can't do 'eavy work," said the boy with unexpected honesty. "If yer puts me to light jobs I'll be orl rite, but I've 'ad pneumony."

"How long since?"

"I've been out of the 'firmary two or three weeks. That's 'ow it is I gets knocked out easy, and grew ser tired I went to sleep in yer cart."

"It's a van—not a cart, laddie. A van has four wheels and a cart only two. That's your first lesson as a farm boy. Come along back to the house now, and I will see that you have some breakfast and somewhere to sleep."

He turned and walked back slowly, past the potato patch and over the road, Charley the Prig pattering behind him. As they reached the open space between the farmhouse and the distillery a great shadow leapt up the sunshiny wall, and a dog came out of the open doorway of the farm towards his master. His massive head and heavy jowl looked decidedly grim, and the hackles rose on his back at the sight of the small ragged figure at Daish's heels. The boy stopped short and shrank—a fatal sign of cowardice that turned the dog's welcoming bark to an unmistakable growl.

"Hector!" said the farmer sharply.

The dog stopped, and the growl stopped too; but he did not look any the more friendly. They eyed each other, the boy under his mat of smooth black hair, and the animal under his wrinkled forehead.

"You mustn't be afraid of him, lad," said Daish a trifle anxiously. "He looks bad-tempered, but if you let him alone he will let you alone. He is a very necessary guard here, and he suspects you of being a tramp. Once he gets used to the sight of you he will let you pass as he does the men."

"I ain't afraid!" said the boy boastfully, but he dared not move a step forward and his dark eyes regarded Hector with a look that was half suspicion and half a mischievous desire to tease. "Lumme!

he's got a jaw! I'd sooner lose the grub, guv'nor, if he's in the 'ouse!"

"Don't take any notice of him, and follow me," said Daish, pushing the great dog on one side on his way into the farmhouse. Charley followed closely, but as he passed Hector he made a half-jeering motion from the safety of the farmer's protection, to "get some of his own back" for the humiliation of his cowardice. The next instant he was flying past Daish and into the porch with a whimper of fear, and Hector was straining at his collar as his master caught him. John Daish ordered the dog away and followed his protégé, very angry.

"Charley," he said sharply, "if you attempt to play tricks with the dog I won't have you on the farm an hour. I can't be responsible, mind that, and I won't take risks. Do you hear, boy? The dog could have you by the throat in an instant, and I could not prevent his mauling you, if nothing worse."

Charley looked up at him, still trembling with fright but with a certain defiance in his hollow dark eyes.

"Who yer talkin' to?" he said impertinently. "I ain't likely to play the goat with yer lap-dog out there, after this. He'd be chewin' of me on the mat in 'alf a mo'!"

Daish bit his lip in the effort not to laugh. The boy's insolence and pluck together were irresistible. But he was relieved that Hector had really given him a fright if it saved something worse, and did not encourage Charley to make friends with the cross-breed. It would indeed have been difficult, for the dog took

a dislike to the newcomer from that hour, and though he did not attack him and allowed him about with the men, it was more prudent in Charley to go round by the stackyard to reach the lavender fields than to pass the distillery if Hector were in the yard. They hated the more as they both gave a jealous devotion to John Daish, and regarded each other as rivals to his favour.

Charley was fated to make another enemy on his first introduction into Leith Farm, for as he followed the farmer again into the big tiled kitchen a sharp-faced woman with a print overall covering her neat gown turned from the fire and looked at him with scant approval.

"Breakfast is just coming in, Mr. Daish. Who's boy is that?" she asked, with a jerk of her thumb towards Charley.

"A waif and stray from Covent Garden who had crept into the van and fell asleep," said Daish quietly. "He wants to learn farm-work——"

"He wants a good birching from the magistrates, more likely," said the woman, very much in the tone that Hector might have used if he had been able to speak. "Those London ragamuffins are the very scum! We want no Barnado boys at Leith, Mr. John. Send him out with the dog at his heels, sir!"

"I have promised him a job," said John Daish quietly. "Will you please see that he has some breakfast as well as the men who came down with the van, Mrs. Skelton, and I will see where he can be billeted."

The woman's harsh, elderly face flushed brick-red at the order. When John Daish used that tone of

authority everyone at Leith knew that he was going to be obeyed whether it were a rash experiment or no; the old men who had worked for his father had heard it when the new machinery was put up in the distillery and they shook their heads over its installation. In the present instance his housekeeper knew that the boy must be housed and fed, for the present at any rate; but she had been with the Daish family ever since John was a lad, and she raised a protest as no one else would have done.

"There's none of 'em will want to take him into a clean cottage! Like as not he's swarming!"

"I ain't!" said the boy angrily, and losing his *insouciance* for the first time. "Swarm yerself! I've bin kept as clean as those bloomin' saucepans, in the 'firmary, and I ain't got warm with the old London crust yet!"

"Shut up, boy!" said Daish harshly in the effort not to laugh. "You must speak civilly to Mrs. Skelton. Sit down in that corner and have your breakfast, while I speak to Somers about you."

Charley took himself and his rags—fairly clean rags, considering that he was a vagrant and a wanderer—into a distant corner of the speckless kitchen, and ate his breakfast in sullen silence. Mrs. Skelton slapped a bowl of porridge down on the wooden bench on which he sat, and gave him a hunch of bread and butter and a cup of sugarless tea to follow. He seemed to enjoy the food, which was good and wholesome, but he sniffed at the bacon she was frying for her master as some dainty cat who leaves off lapping milk to smell fish.

Mrs. Skelton disliked him as much as Hector had done, his vagrant condition and his impudent black eyes, and as soon as he had finished his meal she turned him out of the house to await John Daish's further orders in the yard. The boy made a face behind her gaunt back, just as he had jeered at Hector, and sauntering out to the farm buildings with an indescribably jaunty air he proceeded to inspect them. The barns and the stables seemed to interest him in particular, especially the lofts, and when Daish came out to speak to Bill Somers about him he had already selected his bedroom after his own primitive fancy.

"Look 'ere, guv'nor," he said, pointing to the loft above the stalls where Emerald and Ruby were lying down like sensible horses after their night's work. "I won't go with the men—they'd think I was dirty like that old girl with the wish-bones in 'er cheeks." (Daish tried not to appreciate the mental sketch of his housekeeper's profile.) "I ain't dirty, but their wives would scratch like your 'ens if I was round, thinkin' of it. I'll berth up there—above the 'orses. There's plenty of 'ay. Give me a blanket and I'll be orl rite."

John Daish was the more ready to fall in with the gipsy instinct because he knew that what Mrs. Skelton and the boy said was true—the men would not welcome the ragged street Arab in their decent cottages, and their wives would suspect dirt and its foul results even where none existed. He told the boy he might try it, and himself inspected the suggested bedroom, insisting on Mrs. Skelton supplying an old blanket from the household store, and himself unearthing a

tin jug and basin and a hair-brush to complete the furnishing. He knew that Charley must have been accustomed to the decencies of life while in the infirmary, and he hoped that the boy might keep himself clean and respectable if given the means. Charley begged, borrowed, or stole a piece of soap and a rough towel for himself, as Daish discovered with secret satisfaction, and from the day he entered the farm he was never billeted on the men, but went his own odd way, managing for himself with perfect independence at least.

He ate with the men, but he never slept amongst them, and his bath was the little stream that ran just beyond the boundaries of Leith farm. At one point in its wayward course it broadened out into a wide pool beneath overhanging trees, and the spot was unpopular because of a ghost-story connected with it. But either the tale did not reach Charley's ears for a time, or he was indifferent to it, for there he splashed about in the crisp mornings, so early that even the men only met him returning to breakfast, and none of them ever went down to bathe with him. No more did the boys who lived in Daish's cottages with their parents, and who were either at school or working on other farms round about, for they were not so fond of fresh water as the little gipsy, for all his rags and dirt. Their wits were slower than his, too, though their muscles were harder, and did they encounter he showed a facility in resource that gave him the upper hand.

In a few days he was as familiar a figure about the farm as any of the men, and as free of the place as some mischievous animal might be with amusing

monkey tricks. He would not do hard work—not yet, at any rate—but if a job pleased him he was very quick to learn to do it, and do it skilfully. John Daish made gradual discoveries about him that made his character and origin still more of a perplexity, but by no means lessened the interest he excited; as, for instance, that he knew nothing about horses, and had never handled them, though it might be supposed that he had had jobs in the great markets of minding them, and should have learned still more from his gipsy friends. But he was by no means averse to a ride on Emerald's or Ruby's broad, patient backs, and at the end of a week had associated himself with them for this privilege, and could be trusted to feed or yoke them. If the harness were too heavy the men lent a hand, and the same with the grooming, which he would hardly attempt. His tongue and his temper got him his own way with the more good-natured of the farm labourers, and he never forgot either a kindness or a cruelty.

It puzzled John Daish in his secret mind that the boy should remain at Leith and seem content, for he half expected to find that he had gone off tramping again some fine morning. His vagrant life must have had its own excitements, and been full of change, and the gipsy blood that he claimed could ill brook either the discipline or the monotony of the work that he could not entirely avoid. At times indeed he would be sullen, or openly defiant of authority, and came nearer than he knew to drastic punishment; but the patience that he inculcated with animals Daish felt bound to extend to this half-savage, half-ignorant

creature that shared many of their instincts, and he hoped that the boy might become more humanised and more influenced by example than by rough treatment. If he were given time he might make a decent working man of the unpromising material in the little waif, but he had small hopes that Charley would not weary of the life in a very short space.

There were, however, two factors in the case that he had discounted: one was the boy's odd liking for himself, which might develop into devotion—the other the attraction of the lavender. Those great fields of moving colour, breathing scent with every wind that passed, and flushed with every shade of purple-blue, were a fascination to the boy of which he never seemed to tire. If he shirked work, or were missing, Daish began to be pretty sure that he should find him loitering along the path that edged the cultivation, or in the narrow alleyways between the clumps, sniffing the perfume like the sybarite that he was in some ways, for Charley the Prig had a dainty appetite and a quick sense of luxury, despite his wild origin. Once Daish found him actually asleep on the bank that divided the mature from the two-year-old plants, his round black head supported on his arm which was half cuddled round the stalks of the swaying purpled flowers. He was flushed with sleep, and the black curled lashes lay like separate shadows on the thin cheeks. Wake him, and he would be once more the insolent, shrewd, ungrammatical, disillusioned arab of the streets; but as he lay there, innocently asleep, he might have had some pathetic affinity with one of the wood gods, divinely dowered and only half human. He had few

of the real attractions of boyhood, but the young farmer turned away without disturbing him, and even with a little ache at his heart. Let him lie, and dream at least of the beautiful side of life, though he did not recognise it when awake!

CHAPTER II

JOHN DAISH OF LEITH

"If the weather don't get better the crop won't be ready for cutting till the middle of August," said Bill Somers, as he rolled his tobacco between big, soiled fingers. "And the mint'll be in the coppers first!"

The oldest lavender man on the farm, who had worked for Daish's father, looked up and snorted. "The mint's got the snuff with the rain," he said. "If Master John's wise he'll cut now, and not wait for it to come to full growth, or for the lavender either."

"July's early for the mint," said another man dubiously. "When did you reckon to harvest lavender in the old man's day, David?"

"First week in August, and never a day earlier," said David sententiously. "The seasons were not so rackety then. We could calc'late on the crops almost to the day. But Lord! now it's like everything else. Seems as if summer were on strike, and not knowin' what she wanted!"

He looked soberly over the long reach of the country that rolled downhill to the soft woody hollows of Surrey, and up again to Leith Hill in the far distance. The foreground was blue-grey with the lavender, which was losing the first gaiety of its blue flowers and

beginning to swell in the seeds, rich with the oil which supplies the scent; but there was a drizzle of rain falling and the lavender fields faded into an ominous mist. The men were grouped in one of the long buildings round the stackyard, eating an eleven o'clock lunch of bread and cheese, for they had been at work on the farm since five, and John Daish was a just man to the labour he employed and fed both his men and his cattle well. Behind the group of farm hands stood the empty van in which the lavender and other crops went to market, and perched up in the driver's seat was the boy Charley, munching his share of the lunch and looking with observant dark eyes from one face to the other.

"Well, anyhow, we'll send no more of the crop to the Garden this year," he announced, with the air of a proprietor in the cultivation. "The big clumps are nearly ripe."

"Hulloa, young shaver! you know a lot, don't you?" said Jonah the teamster, with faint ridicule. "Where did they learn you that? In Covent Garden?"

"Naw—I've kep' my eyes open since I've bin on this little 'lotment, and that's more'n you can do even with your missus to prop 'em up, Jonah Wickham," said the boy with a hot flush in his thin face. He was tart of his tongue at the first attack, and venomous in his retorts when roused.

The men, instead of cuffing him, all laughed, for Jonah's habit of sleeping off the night's beer next morning was notorious, and his wife's efforts to rouse him lest he should be late at roll-call.

"You're a smarty!" said one of the younger men

half admiringly. "Tell us, now, what was your job in Covent Garden? Loadin' or horse-keep?"

"I was a gleaner," said Charley solemnly, with an indescribable contraction of his left eye. "Know what that is, Joe? Well, I'll tell yer. Abart twelve o'clock the dear little children comes out o' school, and then they runs through the Garden and gleans for themselves. I was a gleaner, too, though they couldn't cotch me for school. Lord lumme! some o' them shop chaps didn't dare leave their open fronts when I was by, not 'alf!"

"What's gleanin'?" asked one of the more stolid hands, staring up at the excitable face and the black eyes, so vivid in contrast to the heavy yokel type prevalent amongst the men.

"You mean priggin', I suppose," grunted old David disapprovingly.

"I'm ashamed of you, Mr. David!" said the boy with mock resentment. "Priggin', indeed! We *gleaned!* You carries a needle and a long thread inside yer jacket, and when yer gets near a nice pile o' tomatoes yer slips the needle through the skin o' one o' them and draws it out as nice as can be without touching a fruit. I don't 'old with snatching"—he shook his head virtuously—"unless you can get clean away. The gals mostly works in Leaden'all. They 'as a bag, and strips the fat off the butchers' meat as they passes."

"Wot for? To make puddings of?" asked a dozen voices.

"Puddin's! Not much. They sells it to the factories. A smart gal will make a tidy sum gleanin,

fat. I was a fust-class gleaner, I was—there was nothin' to touch me in Bow Street."

There was a sudden stir amongst his listeners, and the boy was instantly aware that he had lost the interest of his audience. Turning round his black head to see, he caught sight of a tall figure in overalls and mackintosh, and realised that Daish had come into the building to speak to old David in passing. In a second the boy had swung himself down from the van, and slipped through the group of men, reaching the farmer's side as if drawn by habit. He stood there apparently unnoticed, until Daish had finished his conversation, when the farmer turned on his heel, speaking over his shoulder as if to his dog.

"I want you, Charley."

The boy turned also, with the jaunty air of a little soldier, and followed his master. Despite his prompt obedience, there was something of a mock daring in his movement that brought a sheepish smile to the men's faces. If Daish knew it he took no notice, but walked out through the unpleasant rain across the stackyard and over to the distillery, glancing down at the round black head at his side as he did so. Charley never wore a cap, his thick mop of hair being good enough protection from sun or bad weather.

"Was that true that you were telling the men? That you were a Covent Garden thief?"

The boy shuffled along uneasily at the tall man's side, looking up under his curled lashes with stealthy distrust.

"Some of it were," he muttered. "P'r'aps I made a bit of a yarn of it—but I told yer they called me the

Prig, guv'nor!" There was reproach as well as self-defence in the tone.

"Have you ever been in the hands of the police?"

"Not for priggin'. I've bin took up for wandering twice."

"You slept out?"

"Lord lumme, there ain't no chanst to sleep in the Garden since the regulations! Yer may get overlooked at Leadenhall or the Fish Market, but the best lay is a roof up an alley."

"Don't tell me lies, boy, and think it's funny," said the farmer almost harshly. "You are not showing off before the men now. How could you sleep on a roof? How would you get there?"

"Climb!" said Charley, with a snap of his black eyes. "I don't mean the roof of a great 'ouse, but a shed or some low shanty. 'Eaps round the slum quarters. Yer climbs up there and lays out on the tiles, and the coppers never cotches yer. 'Tain't ser bad this time of year, but in the winter it's crool!"

John Daish's face had softened from its frowning suspicion to something like remorse. The boy was so slight, and still so thin in spite of the wholesome food, that the picture of him picking up a scanty living by "gleaning" in the great markets and sleeping out on the roofs of sheds gave the big man a shamed heart-ache. He was no coddler of humanity, and thought the better of men for roughing it; but no farm-hand at Leith had undergone the severe training that Charley accepted with supreme nonchalance.

"Have you had any schooling, boy?" he asked abruptly.

"Had to, when the eddication blokes caught me. But I've bin on the tramp so much they don't get me often. I kin read and write and I like figures."

"If I lent you books would you read?"

"I'd sooner have a paper, guv'nor, with pictures in it."

Again Daish felt as if he had received a douche of cold water. The boy was always disappointing him in this way, after some glimpse of what seemed a finer nature. His love for the lavender, his quickness in making himself popular with people, which almost amounted to sensitiveness, even his monkey tricks, raised him above the level of the mere yokel; but on the other hand he was the veriest little Goth in all things spiritual or intellectual, which appealed to his master to an unrecorded extent. Hector, growling at them from the distillery doorway, had as much or more artistic sense.

John Daish was himself a practical man and a capable farmer, but by nature he was a student, and an idealist. His father had run the farm on more general lines than the son was doing, and had prospered so that he was able to send John to a good school and was not bound to make him a farmer also. He was ambitious for his son according to his lights, the goal which he set before him being that he should become a rich man. To this end the boy was put into the offices of Messrs. Denman, the greatest agricultural implement makers in England; and the heads of the firm being old Daish's personal friends, it was reasonable to suppose that young Daish would be put into a position of trust very soon if he had any suitability

in him. Mr. Denman had no son of his own to push in the business, and was ready to take a personal interest in John's career.

But young John had left school with the one burning desire to go to college and study for study's sake, regardless of material success. He was bitten by the craze To Know, and his heart was full of art and science and abstract 'ologies' that had nothing to do with money-making. He endured the office stool for six months, and then he flatly refused to go on at Messrs. Denman's, with a strain of obstinacy that may have come from his yeoman forefathers. If it were a choice between that and the farm, he would rather be a farmer; and his father's grim mouth warned him that it would be no fancy vocation either. He came back to Leith and was taught his work by practical experience, working with his men, up at dawn and before it, to bed by sunset, dog tired, and with no time for the study for which his soul hungered. He became a farmer from stress of circumstances, and when his father died he took over the farm as a matter of course and was his own master, his mother having died many years before and he being the only child of the marriage. He made one difference at Leith, but that was an essential one. His father had grown a small crop of lavender and peppermint as an experiment for some years before his death, but the larger part of his land was under crops and pasture. John Daish the younger increased the lavender until it absorbed all the land suitable for its cultivation, with a lesser area devoted to peppermint. There was enough pasture left for the cattle and to lay up hay, and if the experiment was a costly

one at first it had paid by steady increase since the setting up of the new plant in the distillery.

Both the peppermint and the lavender were valuable crops, particularly in a favourable year, but the lavender was the more valuable. John Daish was respected in the neighbourhood as long-headed for a youngish man, though his neighbours had said he was a fool when he first began to change the old traditions of Leith, and to use most of the old arable land for his new fad. It is eminently characteristic of the English farmer that he looks askance on any innovation in his profession, and is even more insular than other masters of industry; but once he recognises the material gain from patient labour he will attribute a kind of cunning to the innovator. Daish was spoken of as shrewd, a longheaded 'un, a man with a nose for money; the truth being that he hardly deserved even the commendation of being a practical farmer. His success was the result of intense interest in his speculation, rather from the scientist's point of view than that of the agriculturist, and a secret craving for an outlet for the old abandoned dreams. He wanted beauty—the beauty of scent and colour—instead of the prosaic skinning of earth and Nature that make up the ordinary farmer's life. It was an instinct of self-preservation that made him pull down his pigstyes and clothe the softly swelling slopes with waving purples over which the bees hung and droned in a delirium of bliss. But his little world saw only the price of the oil from the great coppers, and justified him for his folly as a wise man.

He had never found a living soul who gloated over

the lavender as he did until the coming of the boy Charley with his gipsy face and black eyes. A half-shamed purpose of taking and training the boy as his own son began to lurk at the very back of John Daish's most secret mind. He was thirty-eight, and unmarried, nor had maid, wife, or widow ever been the worse for him, for all his strong manhood. Some strain of the Puritan lingered in the Daish family, and set up a standard before them for womanhood that made John as fastidious as any great gentleman whose wife must be without stain or reproach—more so, indeed, than many. He demanded impossible virtues from the exuberant blood in the lusty veins of the rustic community round him, and red cheeks and moist lips left him indifferent. There was only one woman whose name had ever been coupled with his own, and that was his cousin's, Lillias Daish; but they had been as brother and sister, and far more like to each other than many brothers and sisters. They were both Daishs in temperament, and looked with calm, dispassionate eyes upon the gossips who nodded and grinned in anticipation of a marriage that had never come off. John Daish, in his heart, would have liked a child, but he shrank from the necessary medium of a wife. When other men's children clung to his hands or tumbled about his feet, his heart ached for his lost fatherhood, but it had not driven him into taking a wife. He had never even thought of adoption until the waif of Covent Garden drifted into his life, but there was something in the boy's very wildness and untamed revolt at the humdrum of steady work that appealed to him. For he also might have been a

rebel, had not necessity and tradition yoked him to the harrow.

Charley's outspoken aversion to books was discouraging; but the "paper with pictures in it" put Daish on a new track with regard to him. He had called the boy away from the men to set him to work in stacking some wood, the secret purpose in his mind being to keep him under cover this wet day after his recent attack of pneumonia. He was uneasily conscious that he often now planned to shelter the boy's slight and shivering body when he would have sent a stouter urchin out into all weathers to harden him. Daish hardly knew what had come to himself, and had a shamed fear that he should get the reputation of "coddling" his protégé, but as he glanced down at the thin little frame a great pity surged up in his big heart, and he felt as he did when the young calves had to be taken from their mothers and he shunned meeting the cows' piteous eyes. Sentimentality in a farmer was ludicrous, but he was secretly thankful that there was so little stock now at Leith.

Instead of sending Charley direct to the wood-shed, however, he took him into the house and to the parlour, which was his one living-room, his pulse beating a little quicker at the idea of a new experiment. The boy came reluctantly. He was rarely allowed in the house if Mrs. Skelton were about, and as he returned her aversion with a good honest hatred he was quite willing to keep away. Daish himself was guiltily conscious of relief that his housekeeper was busy in the kitchen, and hoped that she would not hear them.

He dreaded the shrewd hard eyes that condemned his favouritism, more than any of the men's.

"Come in here, Charley," he said, opening the sitting-room door. "I've got some old papers you may have if you like."

As it happened the boy had never been further than the kitchen before, and he stood sheepishly in the doorway of the inner room as if a little afraid. It was a pleasant room, though unpretentious. The fireplace was an open hearth, and in winter John Daish thought that it was even cosier than in summer, with its crackling logs. The walls were panelled—not, alas! with oak, but with a good dark pine—and there was a solid centre table polished by much rubbing, and deep, shabby armchairs. It was just a comfortable farmhouse parlour with a window-seat in the square bay overlooking an old-fashioned garden. The only things of artistic merit were the water-colours on the walls, but it was to these that the farmer trusted for his experiment, and he glanced covertly from the boy to the pictures as he carelessly pulled a pile of old *Graphics* out of a corner and threw them on the table.

"There!" he said. "You can have some of those if you like."

But Charley was no longer at his side. His eyes had been caught, as John Daish hardly dared to hope, by the pictures on the old dark walls, and as if drawn by them he had drifted across the room and was glancing with eager eyes from one to another.

"Who did these?" he asked with that subtle change in his voice that John had first noticed when he saw the lavender.

"Oh, a painter fellow who stayed here one summer, and couldn't pay for his board. He left me the pictures instead. Do you like them, Charley?" asked Daish softly, almost afraid to speak and drive that rapt look from the black eyes as the boy stood absorbed before a sketch of the slopes below the farm with their summer harvest of joyous blue.

The boy gave a little choking cough, as if something took his breath away. "It's the lavender itself!" he said.

It was indeed. The artist had caught the very blue of it, and had flung it on the canvas in all the glory of its rich bloom. It was only a small drawing, but the boy had been right in going to it before the others, good though they were. He stood entranced, his thin lips a little parted and his eyes wild with a feeling which he did not seem to know how to express—the little "gleaner" of Covent Garden, who boasted his skill as a thief, and was known as Charley the Prig by his own confession!

"I wish I could do that—make a picture of it so that I could take it away with me!" he said below his breath, and a pang went through John Daish's heart at the unconscious betrayal.

"Why do you want to take it away with you, lad? Are you going on the tramp again?" he asked suspiciously.

Charley's eyes narrowed to something of their old cunning, and he glanced at John with the expression of a wild animal in fear of the trap.

"I'm going to see the crop in," he said cautiously. "S'pose I shall get out on the road again some day, though."

"Are you not happy here? You are getting on all right with the men."

Charley grinned, showing all his little white teeth. The effect of the pictures seemed to be passing off him, and he spoke in the old manner. "I can make 'em larf—that's why they likes me. I gets on all right. Don't you bother, guv'nor." His eyes wandered back to the walls and he looked half hungrily from one picture to another, always returning, however, to the lavender.

"Where's that?" He had paused before another sketch.

"Leith Common. Have you been up there yet?"

"No. Better than 'Ampstead 'Eath or Wansted Flats, ain't it? That's a bit of the farm——"

"Yes, down by your favourite bathing stream."

"I know. I see it like that most mornings. I like the lavender best, though."

"Can you draw, Charley?"

"Never tried."

"You seem very fond of pictures."

"I'm very fond of apple tart, but I can't make it like the Skeleton!" said the boy coolly, and Daish had a momentary impulse to shake him like a rat for his perversion of Mrs. Skelton's name and his impudence. Only the memory of that strange, inspired look on his face saved Charley from merited punishment this time.

"Take your papers and go," said Daish curtly. "And remember not to speak of Mrs. Skelton like that to me again. I won't have it."

The boy looked up at the angry beauty of the man's face as if a little abashed for once, and slunk towards the door.

"Sorry, guv'nor!" he said, but offered no further apology.

The fascination of the pictures unfortunately remained with him. He wanted to examine them for himself; and perhaps some other attraction in the civilised parlour drew him from his rough outdoor life to visit it again, though uninvited. It was easy enough to get into the house, since its open doors and windows all stood wide in summer, so long as the housekeeper did not catch him, and he trusted to his catlike quickness to avoid her and Hector. John Daish he did not fear, though he stopped short at asking if he might look at the water-colours again. For reasons of his own it was easier to take "French leave," and slip in through the garden or by the front door; nor did anyone ever know how often he had been in the house, or that he was there at all until the unlucky day when Mrs. Skelton came in to lay her master's tea earlier than usual and caught sight of a ragged figure standing in rapt silence before the little sketch of the lavender fields, which Charley had taken down from the wall and held in his hands, drinking it in with a new soul in his black eyes. . . .

The first Charley knew of the housekeeper's presence was the picture snatched from his hands and a stinging box on the ear that knocked him sideways across the room in the direction of the window. It was open, and, half dazed, but with the instinct to escape, he flung himself over the sill and doubled across the garden,

leaving Mrs. Skelton to meet her master with a flaming face as he came in to his tea.

"D'you know what I've just found, sir? That blasted boy, standing in the parlour as bold as brass, looking at everything, and helping himself, no doubt! He'd got one of your pictures in his very hands"—she thrust the drawing of the lavender fields at John as proof of her words, convincing him, however, of something very different to what she intended. "I soon sent him off with a flea in his ear! But we shall have to look sharply after things to see what he has taken. That's what comes of this petting and encouraging beggars from the streets!"

John Daish was tired, for he had been out since a very early hour, and had hardly come back to the farm until now, even for meals. He was worried, too, about the peppermint, which certainly showed signs of snuff, and his housekeeper's tirade was the last straw. He turned upon her with a sharpness bereft of his usual patience.

"If you mean Charley, I took the boy into the parlour one day myself to show him something. He may have thought he had permission to come there in search of me."

"In search of something to put in his pocket or his stomach more likely, Master John! Don't tell me. The men call him Prigging Charley, and with reason, too. Now I know where the eggs have gone lately, and half a crown that was lying on this very table from the washerwoman. I wish you'd hand him over to the police and have done with it."

"I found the half-crown myself, down amongst

some things in the table drawer," said John curtly. "Don't talk nonsense, Mrs. Skelton, and don't accuse anybody on this farm without more proof than your own prejudice."

"I'll find proof soon enough! It's only to watch him. Eggs has gone, and I've fancied the milk was stolen. Like enough, with a thief about the place, encouraged to help himself!"—Mrs. Skelton's temper was rising with her colour, and she banged the cups on the table as a vent to it. "I gave him something he'll remember, at any rate!"

John Daish astonished the angry woman by taking her firmly by the shoulders and putting her straight out of the room with scant ceremony.

"I want no more of this kind of thing," he said sternly. "I decline to listen to tales, and you must learn to keep a civil tongue and to treat the work-people properly. Go back to your kitchen. I will see after the little lad."

He shut the door of the parlour on the raging woman but before he sat down to his tea he hesitated and glanced through the open window. Where had the boy gone, and had the housekeeper's rough treatment driven him away?—Nonsense! the boy must take his chance. John sat down to the table and poured out a cup of tea, which he drank thirstily; but it was no use—he could not settle comfortably to his food until he got at the rights of the case. He pushed back his chair, and vaulting over the window-seat as easily as Charley had done, he walked down the garden looking for the boy. Charley was not there, but an open door in the high wall suggested that he

had made his escape into the farmyard, and Daish followed, carefully closing the door which was supposed to be bolted—another grudge against Charley if Mrs. Skelton saw that it was not.

There was no sign of the truant in any of his usual haunts. Hector lay as if on guard at the distillery door, and wagged his sinewy tail at the sight of his master, rising courteously to greet him. But with one cursory glance round the shadowy old barn, Daish turned away from the entrance, stooping in spite of his hurry to fondle the big head at his knee and bidding the dog "Lie down!" before he continued his search. The men had gone to their own tea, and there was no one in the stables save the great cart-horses who turned their heads to look at the farmer with eyes which an Eastern beauty might have envied. Daish climbed up to the loft where Charley slept, ashamed of his own eager anxiety. Not there. He crossed the stack-yard and made his way to the lavender fields, but the boy was not lying asleep to-day, or cuddled down between the sweet ranks of flowers with his black eyes on some distant prospect of the Open Road that he had tramped so often. It was not till John Daish had reached the gate that shut his own property from the public road that he caught sight of a small lean figure stealing by under the hedgerow, towards Leith Common. The boy had no bundle in his hand, for he owned nothing but what had been bestowed on him at the farm; nevertheless Daish knew at once that he was running away, and going back to his vagrant life.

He opened the gate and stepped into the road, striding off in pursuit. The boy did not turn his

head, but he suddenly slipped through a gap in the hedge and disappeared as swiftly as any wild animal that knows it is pursued. Daish followed, and looked up and down the empty field before he found his quarry crouched almost at his feet by the trunk of a giant tree that had been felled for timber.

"Charley!" he said quietly. "Where are you off to?"

He never forgot the face that the boy turned to him. It was livid with rage, save for a portion of his right cheek and ear which were still scarlet with Mrs. Skelton's blow, and in the dark eyes smouldered a hate that might have been murderous in less civilised countries.

"I've done with Leith," he said in a choked voice, but with his better accent. "That hag struck me and called me a thief. I'm off again."

"What were you doing in my room?" said Daish, still quietly. "You know none of the men are allowed in there."

The black eyes still burned in the white face with that dreadful scar.

"I wanted to see the pictures," he said defiantly. "And—and where you sat when you weren't out with us."

"Why didn't you ask me, Charley?"

For the first time the boy's eyes wavered and fell. "Dunno," he said sullenly. "It was easier to get in."

"But we can't have you breaking rules at Leith, my boy, and Mrs. Skelton was quite right in turning you out—though she did it in the wrong way. Will you

give me your word that you haven't been 'prigging' again, either in the house or the larder?"

"I never took nothing of yours, guv'nor," said Charley emphatically. "What did that old Skeleton say I prigged?"

"Mrs. Skelton," corrected Daish with unheard-of patience. But the boy was too angry still to be corrected more sharply, as he saw. "They say that eggs have been missing of late."

"She'd better keep her dairy windows latched!" said Charley significantly. "I know who takes the eggs. Shan't blab on him, neither. He's a friend o' mine." A faint softening that was not quite a smile made his bitten lips quiver.

"If I tell Mrs. Skelton that I know it is not you, and that I am keeping you on, will you come back quietly and keep out of her way? I should like to give you another chance, and—I will show you the pictures again some day."

The boy hesitated, his chest still heaving under the ragged shirt. The backwash of his passion swayed him yet, but he glanced up at Daish beneath his frowning brows.

"I want you to stay, Charley!" said Daish suddenly. "I should be sorry to lose my lavender lad before he knows his work."

The boy gave a kind of gulp in his throat, as he crouched beside the big man sitting so patiently on the fallen tree. They were a strange couple, and John Daish felt it—felt still more the incredible fact that he, Daish of Leith, should be pleading with this ragged, undesirable waif to stay on the farm! And

yet he felt he could not lose the new interest in his life, the queer, attractive, savage creature that was looking at him with wild, wistful eyes.

"I'll stay, guv'nor!" said Charley briefly, and the farmer rose to his feet with a breath of relief.

"Get back to the farm across the fields, boy," he said half shamefacedly. "I'm going by the road. And don't forget your promise."

He expected trouble with his housekeeper when she learned that Charley was not to be driven from Leith even by her righteous indignation; but the worst of her accusations—that of pilfering—John Daish was able to disprove in a day or so, to his own relief. Charley's hint about the dairy window caused his master to keep an eye on the place at odd moments, and one quiet noontide when there was no one about he caught the thief.

The dairy looked upon the small orchard belonging to the farmhouse, and in this enclosure there were generally some fowls and the farm pony who was turned out to grass there. Jerry was old and knowing, and the teamsters declared that he could open any gate that was merely latched. But John Daish had not realised how partial horses are to eggs until he saw the pony come quietly up to the dairy and, pushing his nose against a casement window, work at the fastening with his teeth until he got it open wide enough to thrust in his shaggy head. The farmer was standing motionless at the further end of the cool, shady place to watch, nor did he move when the old pony picked up an egg from the basket within his reach, as cleverly as any monkey could have done, and crunched

it up, shell and all, licking his lips after the dainty. He was still at his deprivations when Daish slipped away to fetch the housekeeper to see, but though she wrathfully drove him away with John's driving whip, and promised to have a new catch put on the window, she was not to be convinced as her master demanded.

"Horses may be rogues—but that doesn't prove that boys isn't," she said viciously. "You mark my words, Master John—it was an ill day for you that you brought that guttersnipe to Leith!"

It sounded as ominous as a curse.

CHAPTER III

LAVENDER HARVEST

THE bees hummed angrily in the haze of the morning, and the white butterflies fluttered in helpless disturbance, for the lavender was all falling at last.

A good many bunches had been cut for the London market, and indeed the younger plants might be cut still throughout the summer for sale to the public, for those of one, two, and even three years' growth did not blossom so soon as the five years. But this was lavender *harvest*, when the ripe crop was cut for the distilling of the oil.

Between the long rows of the ripened plants stood the cutters, using their toothed sickles in rhythmical monotony, and as the lavender fell it was laid on the shorn roots, from which other men picked it up and laid it in the archangel mats which were secured by skewers. If it was not required in the distillery immediately, it was left on the field to "harvest" for some days in order to lighten it; but John Daish had decided not to trust the weather, and the waggon was being loaded as fast as the mats were full. The cutting alone would take some days of unceasing labour, and then the distilling began and did not stop day or night until all the oil was extracted, save for

the week-end rest. John Daish would not ask his men to work on Sunday, even during the distilling.

The field behind the cutters began to look forlorn, shorn of the beauty of its ripened heads. Nothing was left save the short stumps of the plants, and now the lanes between the rows of the crop could be plainly seen. They were just wide enough for the men to move down them easily, but while the plants were in full flower and beauty the branching sprays had almost hidden the narrow paths, so that the field looked as evenly grown as a field of wheat.

Amongst the men filling the mats and loading up the van, hovered the boy Charley with eager eyes. He was not promoted to a lavender sickle or allowed to try his hand at cutting, but he was quick and deft at any work that his strength would allow, and he was here, there, and everywhere if the men with the mats, or the loaders, wanted a hand. It was Daish's own decision that he was not to attempt the cutting as yet, under the plea that he would but hinder the work, and the men had as much as they could do to get the harvest reaped while the weather was favourable, but really from a secret fear that he might injure himself with the notched sickles in his eagerness. A slower and duller-brained boy might at least have been trusted to do himself no injury; but Charley was like quicksilver, and in too great a hurry rather than too slow. There were no other lads allowed on the lavender fields either, though they were employed for the mint.

"I'll give you a lesson myself one day, lad," said Daish kindly, as the boy hovered beside him, watching

his trained movements with those black, impatient eyes. "When the work is nearly through."

"I want to learn now," muttered the boy rebelliously under his breath. "I may not be here another harvest, guv'nor!"

Daish was not listening. One of the farm girls who helped Mrs. Skelton in the dairy had come to the gate with a message for the master, and John dropped his sickle and went across the field to receive it. He stood there for a minute, evidently impatient at the interruption, and then reluctantly followed the girl back to the house to interview his landlord's agent who had ridden over to the farm.

Charley edged nearer to the farmer's deserted post, and his eyes, as though fascinated, fell on the long knife, curved like a sickle. The next man had his back to him as he bent at the work, and was at some little distance, for Daish was a quick cutter and soon covered the space between him and his men. Charley cast one glance at his master's big figure vanishing across the potato patch, and then stooping quickly picked up the sickle. He had seen how the men held the bunches, and he was a born mimic. The first attempt, which he made cautiously, was fairly successful, and he laid the sheaf down on the roots before he seized a second. His dark brows contracted, but he had cut his first sheaf, and he was eager to go on and prove that he could do all portions of the work. Another and another clump fell to the knife, each sheaf being more successfully reaped; but his hands and arms began to feel the strain, and he was less cautious in wielding his sickle. After half a dozen clumps there came a sudden

cry that startled the other reapers, and the boy staggered, clasping his arm, from which a red gash was staining his coarse shirt.

Ten minutes later John Daish returned to his work to find the field in disorder. A group of his men had laid down their sickles, not sorry for an excuse to idle, and were gathered round Somers who was holding up something white and bloodstained in his arms.

"It's that boy, sir—Charley—cut himself with a sickle!" explained a man on the outskirts of the group.

"Charley!—but I gave orders that he was not to do the cutting!" said Daish sternly. "What has happened, Somers? Go back to your work, men—we can't afford to waste time. I will see to this."

"It's his arm, sir—I can't stop the bleeding," said Somers, evidently scared.

Daish had seen accidents before when novices were learning to use the lavender sickles, and his knowledge told him that the injury was only a flesh wound. But the boy looked white and sick, and was as frightened as Somers by the flowing blood and the sharp pain, for he shrank childishly when Daish made a bandage of his own large handkerchief and, pressing the gaping edges together, bound up the wound.

"Shall I have to see a doctor?" he gasped with an evident panic that surprised the farmer until he remembered the gipsy's suspicion of medical skill.

"No," he said shortly. "Not if you are brave enough to let Mrs. Skelton wash and dress it."

Charley's white face twitched, but the mouth hardened. "I don't want her to touch me!" he muttered. "Can't you do it for me, guv'nor?"

The coolness of the request made Daish almost smile, but he owned to himself that it was due to his own indulgence that the boy should take advantage.

"I daresay I could—but you've only got what you deserve for disobeying orders, Charley," he said. "And I don't feel inclined to waste my time when I'm busy with the crop."

He saw the thin little frame brace itself, and the boy made a desperate effort to overcome his faintness.

"All right, guv'nor—you put it across me proper," he said simply. "But I'd rather leave it as it is—I don't want no woman messing it about."

He turned as if to go off to his own quarters in the stables, being useless for further work, but as he turned he reeled a little and the farmer caught him.

"Come, Charley, you can't walk—I'll take you over to your loft and you must lie down a bit. Don't let that arm hang—keep it up as if it were in a sling."

Two of the men came at once and offered to carry the boy over to the stables, their readiness being a tribute to his popularity. But Daish shook his head and told them to go on with the reaping—he could not have their time wasted—while he himself lifted the slight figure in his arms and walked past the potato patch to the farm buildings. It was not far, but had it been farther it would hardly have been a strain on his big frame and muscles, the burden was so pitifully light. He thought how wasted such waifs as Charley must be, if even at fourteen he was as easy to carry as a child of eight. There was something very wrong in a social order that produced such meagre frames for future manhood.

Once or twice he thought the boy had fainted, but glancing down he saw that his patient was making a superhuman effort to retain his consciousness, and when they reached the stable he climbed up to the loft without the help of his master and lay down on the hay. Daish was half pleased to see the plucky effort, half afraid of a reaction.

"Will you lie here while I go to the house and get some proper bandaging?" he said anxiously. "I've got plenty of surgical stuff if you would really rather that I dressed it for you."

"Please, guv'nor!" The voice was rather unsteady, but the boy bit his lips and was evidently braving it out after his first shock.

John Daish went over to the farmhouse and got the appliances he wanted, without telling his housekeeper of the accident. He had learnt a rough surgery for slight accidents on the farm, the nearest doctor being some miles away and Leith owning neither telephone nor motor-car. When he returned to Charley he brought brandy with him as well as the means of washing and dressing the wound, and watched the blood come back to the livid lips with an unacknowledged relief before he proceeded to bandage the arm more scientifically, showing Charley how to keep it in an improvised sling.

There was no doubt that his patient hated pain, though he did not utter a sound while the wound was washed and bound. It was not necessary, fortunately, to stitch it up. But Daish felt the shudder that went through his limbs, and wondered if there were another creature on his farm that had such sensitive nerves.

The boy had to pay for the odd, artistic strain in him, by added suffering.

"Now you'll lie still for the time being, and give yourself a chance," he said authoritatively. "No climbing up or down to see what's going on, mind! Feel sick?"

He asked the question sharply in some surprise, for Charley had turned his face away with a quiver of the lips and two great tears hanging on his thick lashes. At no time could the little Arab be called a pretty boy, but his starved face and gipsy eyes were extraordinarily pathetic with the grace of tears upon them.

"No, but I—I wanted to see the crop harvested!" he stammered with the illogical disappointment of a child.

"Well, it's your own fault, lad; if you'd obeyed my orders you wouldn't have had that accident," Daish said bluntly. "There, never mind! You've seen all there is to see, and you'll be able to come in for the distilling. But listen, Charley—I can't have any more tricks, or trying to do the men's work," he added more gravely. "Machinery is worse than knives, and accidents more sudden."

"All right, guv'nor," was the boy's usual response. "I don't want to fall into your coppers." He looked up with a frank curiosity a minute later and asked a question no one else at Leith would have dreamed of asking. "What was it as took you away from the reaping?" he said. "I see'd the girl come."

"It was a message from my landlord," said Daish, surprised into giving a direct answer to the cool inquiry. "Sir Henry Leith . . . what's the matter now?"

For Charley had drawn back as if stung, with a face that was as blanched as it had been by the accident, and frightened eyes.

"Nothing," he said defiantly. "I don't know the bloke. Didn't visit much amongst Sir 'Enrys or any of that sort. Does he live about 'ere?"

"He lives at Leith Place," said Daish quietly, watching the betraying face with keen eyes. It flashed into his mind that Sir Henry was a magistrate, and that it was extremely probable that Charley had been up before him; but he did not press the question. His landlord might be able to supply him with certain missing links in Charley's history, once he saw him and recognised him; but if he asked the boy he would only lie, that was certain.

"That booze of yours has made me sleepy—I'll have a nap," said Charley with elaborate unconcern. He curled down in the hay like a terrier might, resting his mop of black hair on his uninjured arm.

"Got anything to amuse you, when you wake up?" asked Daish with unaltered kindness, in spite of the suspicions roused by Sir Henry Leith's name. He always intended to treat Charley with the just and impartial consideration that he showed to his men, and he always ended by being beguiled into an indulgence he might have given to a pet monkey.

"I've got those papers of yours here," said the boy sleepily, pulling one of the old *Graphics* out of the hay at his side. He glanced up with his black eyes narrowed by sleep, and an impish smile on his lips. "There's a girl here as dresses herself up like a boy from the streets and thinks she can take us off! Where

is she ? " He turned the pages, and found a picture of a young lady in a set of expensive furs driving a motor-car. " That's 'er," said Charley. " Miss Carlotta Edison. I knows 'er sort ! A pink and white face as clean as a cat, and a broom, and that's a ' City arab ' !—She goes to the 'dustrial 'omes and sees the nice little boys and girls readin' the Bible, and then she imitates 'em. She'd like to get 'old of me and my pals and see the real thing, I *don't* think ! "

All Charley's gamin accent and mannerism seemed to have come back with his scorn of the well-advertised London actress whose name was vaguely familiar even to Daish, though he was not fond of the class of entertainment at which she figured. As he descended the ladder to the stables again he wondered what the lady in the rich furs and the motor-car would have thought of the " real thing " as Charley spoke of himself and the other vagrants, and whether she could ever have reproduced his inimitable manner and accent. Yet his thoughts wandered away from Miss Carlotta Edison in a satisfaction that it was only in such bursts of irony as she had inspired that the boy slipped into his Cockney twang and vulgar phrasing, and that the more they were associated the more Charley seemed to catch his master's cleaner English and better manners with characteristic quickness. It seemed that he could assimilate anything—the life of the slums, the life of the farm, or even the more refined atmosphere of Daish's student days, and the æsthetic beauty of the lavender, both in the fields and the water-colour sketch. What a nature to rescue from a slum environment ! What a crying shame if such possibilities

ended in the police-court and the prison cell! John Daish felt his philanthropy a wise measure, even if he showed infinite indulgence in reclaiming his queer protégé, and was again justified in his folly.

He found the reapers had slackened a little in the heat of the day, as was inevitable without his own supervision, and was perhaps a trifle more the master to reinstate his authority, which might well have been jeopardised by his attitude towards Charley. He fancied the men looked at him a little curiously, but could trust his own control to make his face a blank, and to answer carelessly to enquiries that the boy was all right—he had turned a bit faint, but would soon get over it.

"Lucky it was no worse, sir. Those lavender sickles are nasty things," said old Abel, straightening his back from the stooping. "I mind the time I nearly took my own arm off in your father's day, getting careless like and proud of cutting faster than the other men. And there was not a doctor nearer than Carshalton then, and the old gentleman ups with me into the gig, all bloody as I was, and takes me over. A nasty accident that was! I got the scar now."

John Daish was well into the swing of his work before the reminiscences had ceased. He cut the branching stems with one clean movement of the sickle, as Charley had tried to do, and flung the lavender aside before he answered:

"Yes, a nasty accident. The boy has learnt a lesson. . . . Ten minutes more before the dinner-hour, men. Let's see how much we can get through."

The line of backs bent again under the midday sun,

and the sickles whispered through the stiff stalks as the bruised sweetness fell from its upright glory. Over the despoiled field the bees and the butterflies still hung in disconsolate anger, and the air was full of the ripe scent of the seeding harvest. It looked as if some creeping line of foemen was passing over the field, leaving desolation behind them, as the men moved slowly along their narrow pathways. Now and then one of them would mutter an oath and drop his lavender for the moment, whereat his comrades would look up and ask, "Stung?" as if it were so ordinary an occurrence that it hardly needed the expletive. For the bees had their revenge when they clung, half drowsed, to the flowers, and the men did not know it; but stings were as common as treading on some drunken insect fallen on its back between the rows. The men who gathered up the lavender suffered most, for as soon as it fell the bees settled on it again in swarms and were not always visible.

The gentle swell of the hillside was still lavender-purple, but the underside of the field had changed its colour to greyish-green where the clipped clumps showed the brown earth between. Only in the next field, where the young plants were more sparsely threaded out, the cloud of colour still seemed to float between earth and sky; for these would not be harvested until later, and would not reach their useful growth until next year.

Suddenly, across the lavender fields and the potato patch, sounded the clang of a piece of metal on an iron ring—the rough-and-ready dinner-gong of Leith. The men finished cutting the lavender in their hands,

laid down their sickles, and turned sweating faces to the welcome sound, saying an unconscious Grace before Meat :

" Thanks be to glory there's the grub ! "

Bill Somers came up to the farmer with a sheepish air as they were moving towards the house, leaving the scented heap of lavender half piled in the van.

" What'll I do about the boy, sir ? " he said. " I'll take him over some dinner from my missus if I may."

" Yes, do, Somers—it's very good of you. I suppose he'll want some dinner," said Daish carelessly.

He turned in to the farmhouse where his own meal awaited him. It was a good wholesome dish of liver and bacon, rich with brown gravy, and there were fresh vegetables from the garden. For Mrs. Skelton had no nice perception of more appropriate fare for hot weather, and took her master's healthy appetite for granted. Nor was Daish inclined to quarrel with his own food after his toil during the morning, seeing that he had been up since six and had breakfasted early. What brought the little knit between his wide brows was the knowledge of the fare provided by Somers' " missus," that would certainly take the form of a thick slice of fat bacon on a slab of bread—and the memory of a white, drawn face and a thin body curled up in the hay. There was a dish of ripe raspberries on his own table, and a curd cheese. He looked at them half furtively, and stretched out his hand towards them, but drew it back.

" Better not," he thought. " Nothing so fatal as favouritism, as Mrs. Skelton has warned me. Poor little lad ! If only the old woman had taken a

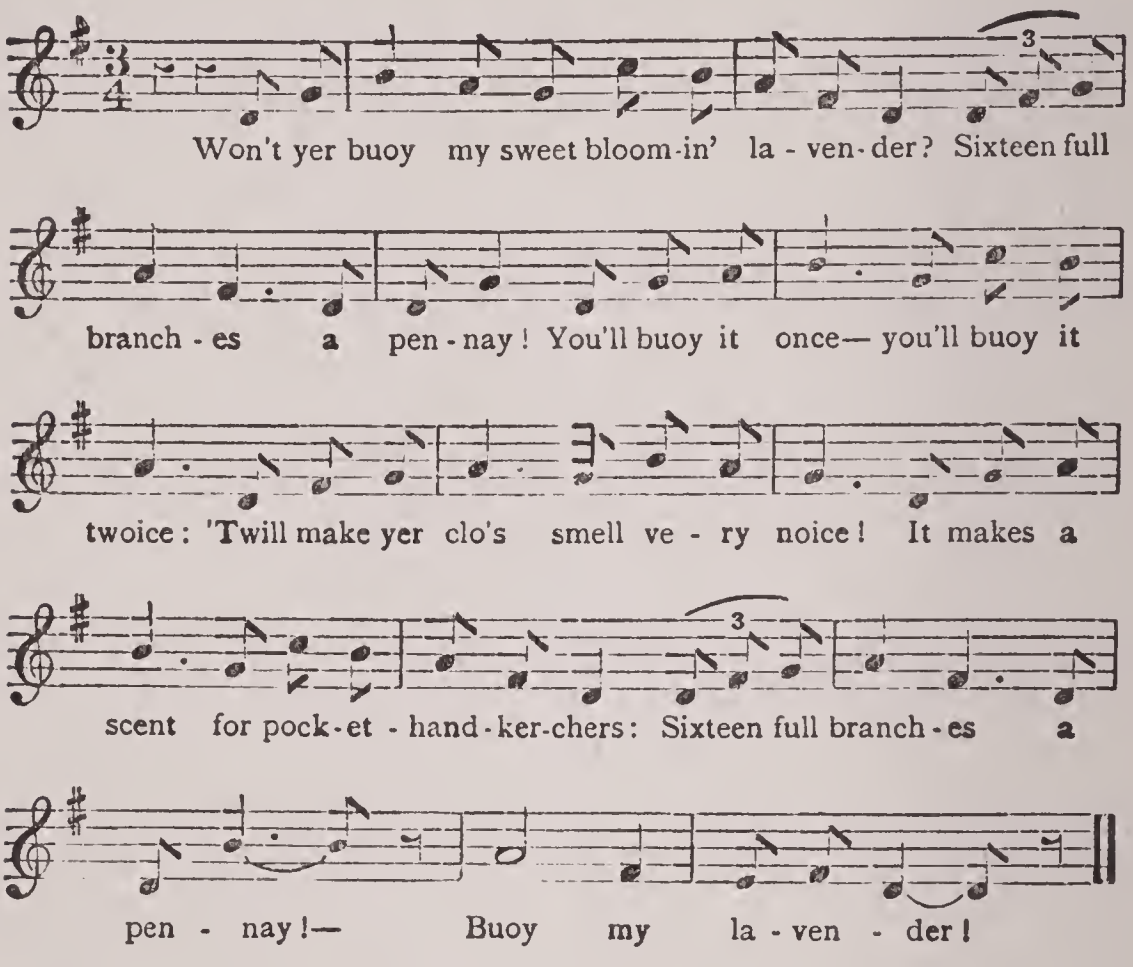
fancy to him she would have fed him properly. But I might as well ask Hector. Damn these women! they read your very mind. A sick child ought to appeal to her—but she would as soon feed the pigs!"

He set to his midday meal pettishly, for Charley was spoiling his dinner as he had his tea on the occasion when the housekeeper had so roughly turned him out of the parlour. Daish was haunted by the thought that the men might forget his forlorn little patient in the loft, and he had forbidden the boy to come down under pain of his own displeasure, which he was beginning to realise was a factor with Charley, despite his defiance of law and order. There was a streak of satisfaction in the farmer's mind over this, for power over any creature has its vague delight, and especially so when it is an object of interest that has turned submissive.

John did not know that he hurried over his dinner, but it was with a sense of relief that at last he crammed his cap down over his eyes and strode out into the sunlight again. The men had not yet begun to straggle back to the work, as he could see by a glance across the empty fields, and there could be no harm in going round by the stables to see if Somers had remembered his promise to feed the prisoner in the hayloft.

As he reached the door of the building where the farm horses were stalled John Daish stopped short in surprise, for he heard the sound of an old woman's voice singing a hawking song that Londoners hear often enough in the month of July—the lavender song that quavers at the kerb when the hawkers carry baskets of stale, dry lavender for sale. Daish had

heard it himself, though it was not so familiar to country-bred ears. But he recognised the rheumy old notes of an elderly woman who has grown hoarse with straining her voice against the traffic.



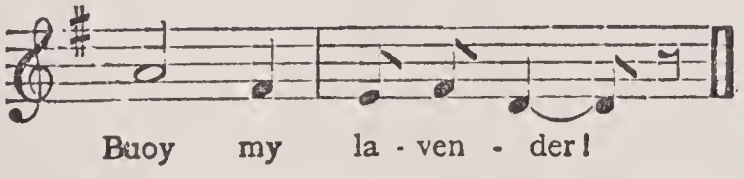
The voice was so old and worn that in spite of the appalling Cockney accent there was something pathetic about it. But how on earth had an old lavender woman from the London streets made her appearance suddenly in the stables of Leith farm? Daish moved a step forward to bring himself within view of the open door, and was greeted by a burst of unconscious laughter—unconscious of his presence, at least, for the audience

inside the stable was too taken up with the street singer even to hear his approach.

Daish found himself looking across the heads of a group of men, facing an empty stall, and in the stall stood a little bent figure in a draggled print skirt and shawl that the farmer guessed at once had been filched from the clothes-line of one of the men's wives. It was Charley, suddenly transformed into a matchless imitation of some old lavender woman whom he must have watched in the London streets countless times, and whom he was reproducing with a mimicry that drew uproarious applause from the men. His injured arm was still in the sling, but the shawl was folded over it, and in the other hand he carried a few sprays of lavender that he thrust forward with a quick running stream of hawking patter in an old woman's weary voice :

" Buoy me lavender, dearie—jest fer luck, do ! I ain't sold a bunch fer an hour. It do smell beautiful ! Put it in yer clo's, and you'll never be without it. Jest these few bunches, laidy—I wants ter get 'ome, and I've 'ad 'ard times lately. Ah there, thank yer, laidy—taike the lot, do—jest to send me 'ome ! "

He broke into the last sad cadence of the song, his voice falling raucously on the stillness :



And then before Daish could draw back, or break into the impromptu entertainment—and he was half

undecided which to do—the boy suddenly flung away the lavender, hitched his skirt up round him, and with a gleam of the devil's own spite in his black eyes, changed his impersonation.

" 'O's this, mates ? " he said, and seizing an empty grain measure began bustling about an imaginary kitchen, slapping plates into the rack, making saucepans ring, scaring away a phantom fowl from the threshold, while the men roared with laughter and applause. Good Heavens, the young imp ! he was the living caricature of Mrs. Skelton in a temper. John recognised the very way in which she ran her finger round a saucepan, pronounced it dirty, and summoned one of the unlucky farm girls to clean it all over again, though he had not known that he had observed these things. It was Charley who was scoring off his absent enemy with his powers of memory and the very genius of mimicry.

But the final burlesque was its own undoing, for Charley suddenly stiffened himself as the housekeeper was wont to do when her master came into the kitchen, and was about to give a far from good-natured imitation of Mrs. Skelton's respect for Daish's presence. Raising his eyes as if to John's stature, he looked up and past the men who faced him grinning, and caught Daish's full, grave glance in reality instead of pretence. The evil light died out of his own face, and for a minute he looked frightened—the cowering fear of a child detected in wrong-doing. The next instant the farmer had vanished without Charley's audience being aware of his vicinity ; but the boy could not regain his self-possession.

"That's all of the old girl to-day," he muttered as if suddenly tired. "I'm going up aloft again, I am—my arm 'urts 'orrid. You'd better double out to the fields too, bloomin' quick, or you'll be late." He flung the skirt and shawl from him pettishly. "That belongs to your missus, Jonah Wickham. She'd spank me for it if she could catch me—but she won't."

The men trooped away, still laughing at Charley's impersonations, while the boy himself climbed back into the sweet-smelling hay, and burying his face in his arms, again sobbed miserably, under his breath, with a vision before his hidden eyes of a beautiful angry face like a wrathful god's, and stern eyes that had softened to a kinder blue only a few short hours before.

"I'm always doing something to make him angry," he choked in the solitude of the loft. "It's my luck . . . and he did like me!—he did like me, or he wouldn't have seen to me himself——"

CHAPTER IV

THE BEAUTIFUL LADY

HECTOR'S objection to the boy Charley extended all over the farm, nor was he reconciled to the newcomer even after a week or so of seeing him about the place. The big dog would not condescend to attack him at sight, and in passing would only acknowledge his presence by a growl in his throat like the mutter of thunder behind the hills. Charley might pass in and out of the stables or the farm buildings on his legitimate work of feeding the stock, or through the stackyard to bring in fodder; nor did Hector actually drive him away from the lavender-fields, though the cross-breed was as often as not at his master's heels while Daish was overseeing the crops. But there was one place in which Hector would not allow his antipathy even to set foot, and that was the distillery. It was a favourite spot to the dog, who lay just inside the open door in the shade, and should Charley pass over the road beyond, the hackles on Hector's back would rise and his square head be lifted from his paws with ugly intent. For some reason of his own he regarded the distillery as under his special protection, and it would have been dangerous for the boy to venture there unless Hector were off guard.

Charley had had no particular attraction towards the distillery, after his first refuge there, until the lavender crop was harvested. But when the sweet bundles were skewered up in the archangel mats and piled on the upper floor, the machinery that was to distil the precious oil became an object of eager interest to the active mind of the "Lavender Lad," as Daish sometimes called him in moments of private indulgence between them. He watched and waited for moments when the dog should be off guard, and once one of the men found him a prisoner astride a great beam that supported the roof, Hector lying below him with bared teeth. The boy was obviously scared, though he bragged it out, for his face was white and his body quivering when the man rescued him and protected him out of the building. After that Charley did not venture into the distillery unless one of the farm hands went over with him, but he contrived to see every piece of the machinery when it was tested and put in order, and had soon mastered this part of the work as he had not troubled to do the ordinary routine of farm life.

He was skulking round the distillery one afternoon, as if drawn magnetically by the great boiler and the coppers which would begin their legitimate business on the morrow, when he caught sight of a woman's figure entering by the gate which opened on the road, and through which Daish had seen him stealing away after his skirmish with Mrs. Skelton. Lady visitors were rare at Leith, and Charley's sharp eyes told him that this was no woman on the farm, or from one of the few neighbouring cottages. It was not even the

housekeeper, for Mrs. Skelton's flat, angular figure was unmistakable even at a distance.

The short road or drive down to the farmhouse was flanked on one side by the old pond, which had been converted into a reservoir for feeding the boiler in the distillery, and for an escape for the water from the coppers ; there was no cover to be obtained here. But on the other side of the road was a thickset hedge bounding a near pasture, and quick as a flash Charley had doubled behind this screen and was creeping along it on the field side, as noiselessly as any scout.

The lady had paused at the gate with some deliberation, and was careful to latch it before she proceeded on to the farm, as if it were all quite familiar to her. As they approached each other, the boy on the inside of the hedge and the visitor on the outside, he could see her distinctly, himself unobserved, and he held his breath and clenched and unclenched his hands in a curiously uncivilised fashion.

She was a tall girl, or rather young woman, for her figure was perfectly developed and had not the slightness and flatness of modern girlhood. She wore a plain white gown of some material that looked serviceable enough to wash well, and a rather large straw hat of a colour that milliners call " burnt," though it was nearer pale coffee than sunburn. Under the shady hat two great plaits of corn-coloured hair were bound round her head in a very unfashionable manner, but which fulfilled two purposes—they suited her face, and they showed the length and beauty of the hair itself. She walked well, with the ease of one who is used to exercise and in perfect health, and as she

passed Charley, now crouching moveless under the hedge, he saw that her face was oval in shape and flushed like a peach, and that her eyes were as deeply blue as the lavender in full blossom. He judged her shrewdly as a woman of thirty, sound in every limb of her splendid body and beautiful of form as she was of face; and the distended black eyes that followed her unconscious movements were full of a great grief and fear.

The young woman walked in the same measured fashion up to the door of the farmhouse, where she was met by a deep bay of welcome, Hector greeting her as he did few people besides his master. The dog rose on his hind legs and laid his forepaws on the visitor's swelling breast, and she bent above him and caressed him with a gracious kindliness that seemed characteristic of her personality. Then there was a sound of welcome, and the farmer himself came to the door and took her familiarly by the arm. Across the still summer afternoon Charley could hear his deep voice full of unusual pleasure.

"Come in, Lillias—come in, girl. You are quite a stranger! I have been wondering what had become of you, and trying to get time to ride down and look you up. Mrs. Skelton will get you tea. I am lucky to be in to see you."

"I mustn't hinder you at lavender harvest, Cousin John," said the young woman as they passed into the house and beyond the range of Charley's sharp eyes He knelt there still under the hedge, his hands clenched with rage and pain, until he slowly raised one and dashed the tears from his hot eyes.

"That's his girl!" he said through his wicked white teeth.

John Daish had led his cousin into the pleasant, familiar parlour, where she sat down in the deep window-seat with the summer garden behind her as background to her fairness. Seen together, as the farmer stood leaning against the window recess, they were singularly alike—the same well-moulded features, smaller in the woman, the oval contour of the faces, the corn-coloured hair, and the blue eyes. Those eyes were deeper and more blackish in John, however; in Lillias they were as exquisite as the lavender.

"We do not begin distilling until to-night," said John Daish, smiling at her. "You look very fit, Lillias. Have you any news?"

Lillias Daish shook her head, as if her thoughts came rather slowly before they found expression on her lips. "I am a little worried over the bees, John. I am afraid we shall not escape the disease after all."

"It is no use my offering to come and look at them for you," said John, laughing. "I should only anger them and get stung for my pains. No one can handle them as you do, Lillias."

"They know me," said Lillias simply. "But I have a great mind to write to an expert about them. If the hives are the least infected I must get new."

"That will be a good deal of expense to you, I'm afraid," said Daish kindly. "You must let me help you, Lillias."

"It would be more expensive to have the disease spreading. No, I need no help, John. If I did I would ask you to tide me over, as you know."

The two pairs of serious blue eyes looked into each other affectionately.

"Does the honey pay you, Lillias?"

"Oh yes—particularly now that Sir Henry has got me such a connection amongst his friends. It is very good of him," said Lillias placidly—so placidly that John forgot or did not think again of the probable reason of his landlord's "kindness" to fair Lillias. There were certain aspects of life, and complimentary relations between the sexes, that Lillias never appeared to see, and probably never did see. Sir Henry Leith was "kind." He was John's landlord and her own, and the reason of his kindness, to her especially, did not trouble her. Therefore by reflex it did not trouble John.

"Is Sir Henry at the Place?" he asked. "I have not seen him."

"No, because he has an attack of gout," said Lillias with her serious shake of the head. "Mrs. Clue, his housekeeper, you know, came over for some eggs, as their hens are not laying well, and she stayed for a bit of a gossip. So I have some news, after all, but the bees put it out of my head—they seem to fill my mind up this last few days."

"What! are the hives more important than Sir Henry? Treason, Lillias!"

"More important to one of his cottage tenants, cousin. Mrs. Clue told me that there was to have been a party, but Sir Henry fell ill and had to put it off. There is only one gentleman at the Place, and he has nothing to do unless he shoots rabbits."

"Poor devil! If Sir Henry is bad he is in bed, and that's rough luck on his guest. Who is it?"

"I did not hear his name, but I shall be very glad if he shoots the rabbits!" said Lillias with a low laugh. It was one of her prettiest gifts, like a gurgle of water running out of sight. "They have been getting into the garden of late, and eating my vegetables."

"We can give you plenty from the farm." He turned as the door opened, with a smile in his blue eyes. "Mrs. Skelton, we have a visitor to tea. And she wants a basket of vegetables sent over to the cottage. The rabbits have been thieving."

Mrs. Skelton stopped with the tea-tray in her hands, and her hard face lightened with a smile at the sight of the girl in the window-seat. Even such crooked personalities as the guard-dog and the housekeeper softened in the presence of Lillias Daish.

"Good-day, Miss Daish," she said heartily. "It's a long time since you've been over. Would you like some watercress with your tea, Master John?"

"Why, Mrs. Skelton, have you got any? I have not been so spoilt since my cousin's last visit!"

"There's plenty in the brook, and that idle boy can cut up there and bring some if he's good for nothing else. He's been cooling his heels for long enough this day!"

John's face suddenly straightened from its smile and became like a well-cut mask. There was no expression in it at all, nor the usual championship of Charley. For the boy was in disgrace with his master since that ill-advised mimicry in the barn, and though John had attended to his arm instead of sending for a doctor, he did so in unresponsive silence, and had had nothing to say to his protégé from that day. Mrs.

Skelton, fortunately, did not know the reason of his displeasure, but she rejoiced to see it and took advantage of it to enforce Charley's uselessness and rebellious ways.

"What boy is that?" asked Lillias calmly, turning her far-sighted lavender eyes from one tell-tale face to the other—John Daish's so fiercely expressionless, the housekeeper's grimly triumphant.

"Ah! you'd better ask Master John," said Mrs. Skelton as she laid the tea and fetched a second cup from the kitchen. "If you said that Leith was evil-bewitched with the devil's own spawn in the shape of that boy, I don't think you'd be far wrong! The very dog knows it, and will have none of him."

"What is Mrs. Skelton talking about, cousin?" asked Lillias as she took her seat at the round table. "Have you got someone new on the farm that she does not like?"

Mrs. Skelton had flounced back to her own domains, and left John to make such explanation as he would. He sighed impatiently, and the cloud did not pass from his face as he answered:

"Only a poor child I took in some weeks since, to train as a farm boy. He is a waif from Covent Garden, who crept into the lavender van and came down with the men—a little gipsy of the roads and streets, and like some half-savage animal at present. Unluckily Hector took a dislike to him, thinking him a tramp, and Mrs. Skelton hates him because he is not so obedient or hard-working even as the boys about here—though they are bad enough! But what can you expect? He has lived all his life on his own resources—thieved

in the London markets, travelled about with hawkers and pedlars and gipsies, and never known what routine or discipline were until now." John's handsome face began to flush, and he spoke with unusual earnestness for such a taciturn man.

"Poor child!" said Lillias softly. "How old is he?"

"He says he is fourteen or fifteen—he hardly seems to know himself. But he is so stunted and ill-nourished that he might be twelve. He was literally in rags, recovering from pneumonia and just out of an infirmary, and he is not much better yet."

"And you could not turn him away, John—that was so like you!" Lillias laid a well-modelled, sunburnt hand on Daish's arm, and her whole face seemed to shine with some inward kindness. "But it is a pity he is so idle. Does he show no liking for the work?"

"I am afraid he has no liking for work of any kind," said John with a half-shamed laugh. "He is a regular little vagabond, I know, but an extraordinary boy in many ways—quicker and cleverer than any farm hand."

"In what way, then?"

"He has a great sense for pictures—colour of any kind, I fancy. It was the lavender in full bloom that first made him want to stay here instead of going off again on the tramp. And he has a perfect gift for mimicry—unfortunately. The men encourage him, and he amuses them. It makes it very difficult to keep order and to be quite just—I can say so to you, Lillias."

"But if he has these gifts they are thrown away on a farm boy," said Lillias in her quiet, sensible manner. "Wouldn't it be better to send him to an Industrial Home, where they make a special point of finding out a boy's bent, and teaching him a trade where he can follow it? Designing, or something like that. There are several in London, and even in Surrey——"

"Oh, he does not want to go—and he would not stay there a day," said John hastily. Somehow his cousin's common-sense suggestion irritated him for once. Lillias was always practical and quite reasonable, but it dimly dawned upon his mind that her processes of thought were slow, if sure, and that she lacked intuition or sympathy with him. "He is a difficult boy, I admit," he acknowledged shamefacedly. "But I think we have more chance of making a decent man of him at Leith than if we got him put into the mould of a charitable education!"

"But then, what will you do with him? If he will not do farm work he is no use here, and it will be an excuse for the men to shirk also."

John Daish had already felt this so keenly that his face darkened still more. "I thought of putting him to school for a bit," he said slowly. "As soon as he is stronger, of course. He is nothing but a bag of bones at present—he weighs as light as a feather! Or I might teach him in the evenings myself. I think he would try to learn with me, because—he likes me, oddly enough."

He gave a queer little laugh, half false shame and half excitement, and the expression of his eyes as he glanced at his cousin was almost pleading. It said

to her: "Don't take this chance away from me—this interest in life! It is a strange and beautiful thing that has happened, but in the prosaic round of my days I have chanced on Romance again in the person of this vagrant boy. He is fulfilling the dreams of my youth."

Lillias' grave glance was contemplative for a full minute before she attempted to answer. Her mind was not as responsive as her heart; but her perfect kindliness made her aware of some slowness in herself, and she was very deliberate in her speech in consequence for fear of giving pain. A very beautiful, balanced nature had Lillias Daish, a little narrow from inexperience, very humble in her desire to help all humanity within her reach, and giving out love as a flower gives perfume—unconsciously, because it was God's gift to her.

"I should like to see the boy," she said at last, in her slow, sweet fashion. "I could perhaps judge better then."

"If you've finished tea we'll go and look for him," said her cousin with a relief that was almost boyish. "I'm afraid it's no use sending for him, the rascal! He is probably hiding somewhere. I have hardly seen him myself for some days. We have had a bit of a tiff through his first disobeying me and then being impudent."

"He seems rather a handful!" said Lillias with her gurgling laugh. "What do the men think?"

"Oh, he is popular with them because he amuses them. He told me so himself! That shows you what a quick-witted lad he is."

Lillias forebore to answer because she could not acquiesce. The description of the boy was utterly opposed to all her principles for boys, or girls either, for that matter. She loved children, but she was not indulgent. Indulgence was by no means a Daish attribute, and she found John's mood the more puzzling in consequence. Lillias looked upon life as a well-ordered thing, in which training was an accepted fact, particularly in one's youth. The revolt of the last generation had either passed her by, or perhaps had come a few years too late to influence her. She had been a dutiful daughter, and from submitting to rule had learned to rule herself. That her own temperament had made this easier than it was to quicker nerves and senses did not occur to her. She thought that John was spoiling his protégé, and wanted to see what could be done to mend matters.

The two cousins went out into the sunny evening in quest of Charley, but instead of the hunt that the farmer expected they had not far to go—not more than a few yards, as it turned out, for the rebel was at their very door. As they crossed the road to the farm buildings a slight figure issued from the stackyard half buried under a load of hay. It was Charley, exemplary in his duty, bringing fodder for the horses, and apparently so diligent in his work that he did not pause even to acknowledge his master in his hurry towards the stables.

"Why, there he is!" exclaimed Daish involuntarily, so surprised that he betrayed his own doubts of Charley's presence on the farm. The boy was far more likely to be playing truant than doing the light work

apportioned to him. He was exempt from cleaning out the stalls or the cowhouses, the labour involved requiring stronger muscles to do it satisfactorily; but he was supposed to feed the stock, and to milk, and to do the endless small jobs that fringe the work on a farm. Half the time, as Daish had discovered, the boy would shirk even these duties and go off no one quite knew where, the men good-naturedly taking his place to save his being found out.

"Charley!" he called authoritatively.

The boy was balancing the load on his round black head and right shoulder to save his left arm, which still rested in a sling, though the flesh had healed more easily than Daish had dared to expect. He disappeared into the stables to deposit his hay, and came back like a good dog to heel with a promptness that did not deceive the farmer. He could judge much better of the boy's temper from his mask-like face and the set of his lips than by his apparent docility. But he came up to the cousins boldly, with a touch to his black hair that seemed natural enough to Lillias but made John only the more suspicious. His sombre eyes were fixed on the lady's face with a curious, almost hungry look in them, and the lids were a little swollen still from a recent passion of tears.

"Yes, sir?" he said firmly.

Lillias was looking at him with kindly interest and some pity. He seemed to her to have been maligned, both by John and Mrs. Skelton. Here was a nice-mannered lad, prompt in obedience and only too willing to work, for the load of hay seemed a heavy one for his slight shoulders.

"Why, my boy, what have you done to your arm?" she asked, touching the sling.

"Had an accident, ma'am, with one o' the lavender sickles," said Charley glibly, but his devouring eyes never left her face. "Mr. Daish he did warn me, but I wanted to work with the men. It's healing nicely, thank you."

He moved his arm quickly away from her hand, as if afraid of being hurt; but Daish knew that it was not that. For some reason his capricious protégé resented the lady's touch, and would not brook it, and his civility and good manners were far more ominous to Daish than if he had been rude. What had become of Charley's Cockney accent, and his London slang and insolence? He was speaking as prettily as a Sunday-school child to its teacher—the model child of the class!

"Have you had your tea, Charley?" asked Daish abruptly.

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"Isn't that a very heavy load for you, with your arm hurt?" said Lillias, still intent on kindness. "My dear John," she broke off, in her natural practical manner, "the boy cannot go about in rags like that! We must find him some clothes at least if he is to do regular work here."

Daish glanced at Charley in trepidation. For some reason that he could not himself explain he expected every moment an explosion of temper that would shock his cousin with an abuse that she would not entirely understand, couched in East End phrases. He knew that the suggestion of respectable clothes was as

tinder to the spark of the boy's resentment, though what he was resenting John could not rightly judge. He spoke almost hurriedly to avert a catastrophe.

"I am afraid we have no farm clothes at Leith about Charley's size. We shall have to get him an outfit."

"Oh, but I have some things laid by of poor little Leslie's, that would do for a time, and at least keep him warm," said Lillias. Leslie was a little cousin who had died a year or so since, and whose wardrobe had been handed over to Lillias for disposal amongst the cottagers round about. "There are some quite stout knickerbockers, and a jersey that would fit Charley, I am sure. And a pair of boots," she added encouragingly.

Then the storm broke. "I don't want yer charity!" said Charley with such sudden fierceness that the girl drew back instinctively. "You can take 'em to the work'ouse for yer own kids that yer've got some right to! Leave me alone. I'm respectable, ain't I? The coppers never ran me in for indecency yet, if my clo's 'as 'oles in 'em. That's more than you can say on Sunday, I bet, with yer skirts short and yer neck bare—'alf naked like all the rest of the girls out with their . . .!" The rush of words ended with a vile suggestion fortunately disguised in hyperbole. Neither of Charley's hearers rightly understood it, for they were unlearned in the latest and foulest *argot* of the slums; but one at least of them could judge its intention.

John Daish was carrying a light ash stick in his hand, which he had caught up as he went through the entry of the farmhouse, half from habit and half from

a memory that the cows would be driven in for milking about this time, and that two or three had but lately been parted from their calves and were a little wild. Without a moment's pause—for if he had paused he would not have acted—he caught Charley by the collar of his ragged shirt and gave him two or three sound cuts with the ash, holding him in spite of his furious struggles.

"Now tell Miss Daish that you are sorry for what you said!" he commanded quietly. "And then if you want to run away, you can go for good!"

His face was very white under its sunburn, but the face of the boy had flushed dark red. He stood in John's grasp like a poor little beaten cur, but the eyes that looked up at him were not murderous as they had been for Mrs. Skelton—they were the eyes of the cur that licks the hand that has struck. One or two men driving the cows in, as John had expected, paused in amazement or the hope of a scene, and Lillias noticed them, though John and the boy did not. She was far the least excited of the group, and had kept her self-possession.

"John!" she said gently, "please let him go. He is punished enough, poor child. The men are hanging about and watching you."

Daish slowly released his grip on the boy's collar and turned his ashen face away. As he did so Charley vanished without the further apology. Whether he slipped into the stables and hid in the loft, or doubled across the stackyard, neither Lillias nor John Daish saw. But he was gone, and the two cousins walked on up to the gate of Leith in troubled silence.

"I am afraid this has vexed you, John!" said Lillias gently, as she took his hand in her warm clasp. "Do not let it. It is nothing to me—only a poor uneducated boy's habit of evil speaking."

"You see my difficulty now," said Daish in a hoarse, broken voice. "I have never laid a hand on him before, Lillias. He will run away from Leith and go back to the road!"

"I do not see why he should," said Lillias reasonably. "He is well fed and housed here, and you say he is fond of you. A little punishment will not harm him—only I wish he were not so ill-looking and thin, poor boy!" In her heart she thought that the beating was probably what Charley needed, and had better have been administered before. And it was, after all, only a few strokes of a light ash stick. "Don't trouble yourself needlessly, John. I believe the boy will stay. I shall anyhow send up those clothes of Leslie's. They will make him look more respectable—less like a gipsy. And when a boy feels respectable he is more likely to act so."

She pressed his hand with her own warm, kind fingers, and turned her fair smiling face on him as she passed through the gate. John Daish stood a moment looking after her. But he did not see the beautiful face or figure that were too familiar to strike him afresh with their loveliness—he only saw the look in Charley's black eyes that were like a beaten cur's, the look of absolute devotion and grieved hurt.

CHAPTER V

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DISTILLERY

THERE was a ripe aroma in the air, almost too pungent for sweetness, and insistent to nausea; for the distillery was at work again, after nearly twelve months of rest.

Three of the men were throwing the mass of the reaped lavender into the first of the coppers, where it fell upon the perforated false bottom through which the steam would presently rise, scalding hot. Their bodies showed, half stripped and muscular, in the strong light of the new American lamp that lit the upper storey of the barn, while behind them the dying day glimmered through the great open doors that had been thrown back to catch the last of the sunset.

Despite the heat of their task—and the sweat hung on the foreheads and necks of the working shift—a change in the weather was making itself felt in the distillery. There would be a sharp ground frost, and the August night was as cold as October. Down below on the ground floor the furnace under the boiler was being fed with coke by Jonah Wickham's brawny arms, and he was not sorry when the furnace door was open, for the fire was almost welcome.

"The shift want to know if they can close the upper

doors, sir," he said, pausing in his grimy task as Daish entered the building. "They say it's cutting cold."

"Yes, of course—the light is all but gone now," said Daish a little absently, running his eye over the condensers and the separator, and mechanically taking the water gauge on the boiler. Forty pounds of steam was beginning to pass through the gauge to feed the coppers, and the pressure was one man's special charge. "How does the lamp go, Wickham?"

"First rate, sir. It's a fair treat after the old 'uns."

Daish turned to run up the stairs to the upper floor, but paused on the lowest as if carelessly struck by a thought.

"Seen anything of the boy, Wickham?"

"Charley? No. He's gone off to his own quarters, I reckon. There's nothing for him to do here, and he'd be in the way," said Jonah a trifle shortly. He was no partizan of the boy's, though he laughed longest and loudest at his mimicry, for Jonah's "missus" objected to the tricks that Charley was too fond of playing and had set her husband's surly temper against him.

"He was very keen on seeing the distilling, and I don't want him tumbling into the coppers or getting smashed with the hoods," said Daish with a slight, forced smile. "Give an eye to him if he turns up."

"All right, sir. But I don't think he will. I haven't set eyes on him since he fed the 'orses this afternoon."

There was a sly twinkle in Jonah's eye, for he had been one of the witnesses of Charley's unlooked-for thrashing—a fact Daish had overlooked. The farmer's

handsome face was absolutely unconcerned as he ran up the ladder-stair, but his heart beat angrily—in anger at himself for the well-merited punishment he had given, and anger at the man for having appreciated it. He had not seen Charley himself since he parted from his cousin at the farm gate ; but he had no chance to hunt for the boy this time, even if he had been so unwise. If Charley had run away in earnest, blind with rage, he must be allowed to go. There was too much work ahead through the coming nights and days to waste even half an hour, and the rich crop was at stake.

As John Daish stepped on to the upper floor the men were actually treading in the lavender, jumping on it with their heavy boots to press it down, but the thickness of the crop now between them and the perforated bottom saved them from the steam. Daish stood and watched them until the copper was full, and the men began to work on the pulley, lifting the great hood into place again, and bolting it down so that the precious crop was almost hermetically sealed. Round the edge of the hood there was sufficient space for a small water suction which prevented it rising even under pressure of the steam. The men worked in shifts of four and a half hours—two on and one off—but the farmer himself knew that he should be about all night, with hardly an hour's sleep, and that this vigil must go on for the best part of a month.

There was no sign of Charley upstairs or down. John Daish stood over the work, while the second copper was charged, talking to the men, or smoking, for the crop at least was not inflammable. Down below there

were "hammock" or canvas chairs for the shift while they waited for the oil to "come over" into the separator. The boiling of the whole charge took five hours, but the oil began to come over in an hour and a half. When the second copper was full they went downstairs and chatted with Jonah, or dozed, the farmer himself being the only one who did not sleep.

He sat with his head resting on his hand, the crisp ripples of his bright hair catching the light, and his face like some fine sculpture in its strange surroundings. His eyes saw nothing of the evening paper which he held, and he was certainly not thinking of his own beauty, though his mind was quite distinctly aware that Lillias had made a picture as she turned to him at the gate, and he recognised her likeness to himself. But he was only thinking of Lillias as the unlucky factor in this afternoon's *contretemps*—her beautiful serene face bent over Charley just before that extraordinary burst of evil speech from the boy. What demon had possessed him? And what had induced him in turn, John Daish, to handle the little lad so roughly? True, Charley had richly deserved it. But Charley had deserved it many times and he had always kept his temper. The dream of keeping and creating a son after his own heart faded out in the glow of the great furnace as Jonah shovelled in the coke and slammed the door, and he turned with a start to find that the oil had begun to come over, and to watch the steady stream of oil and water running into the separator as limpid as if it were one element.

"When did she come over?" he asked the man

who had been on watch more attentively than himself.

"At ten o'clock, sir."

"Then it will be off at three," said the lavender farmer, but without his usual interest. "I'll be back before that"—and he walked rather heavily to the distillery door for a breath of air.

Cold starlight shone over the deserted fields, and the frost he had foreseen was already in the air. He lifted the unconscious, tragic beauty of his face to the night sky and wondered if a shivering boy were trying to sleep under the hedges. As he turned towards the farmhouse for half an hour's sleep Hector thrust a big muzzle into his hand and followed him with slow and rather stately steps. They were a fine couple in the starlight, and had a curious simple dignity in common. Until then Hector had been lying in his usual place in the distillery doorway, but now he mounted guard in the porch of the house after his master entered as if his dog's instinct told him that all was not well with the being he loved best in the world.

The minute the dog was out of the way, a little ragged shadow showed for an instant in the distillery doorway. Then it seemed to fade into other shadows, and the men heard no patter of feet ascending the ladder to the floor above; but when the new shift went on duty to take the hoods off, they were joined by the familiar figure of the boy, on which they did not think to comment save for a friendly warning.

"Now, you limb of Satan, don't go tumbling into the copper. The lavender would be no sweeter for boiling you up with it!"

"You'd get the highest price you'd ever made over the blamed oil!" retorted Charley with an effort after his usual repartee; but he relapsed into an unusual silence, and save for his active curiosity he seemed strained and unlike himself. The men, naturally, put it down to his humiliation of the afternoon.

"The master gave you a dusting for once, didn't 'e, sonny!" said one of the older men with sly good-humour. "Tried it on once too often, with your sauce! You should have kept it for the 'ousekeeper, and left his girl alone."

"Who was the young woman?" asked Charley shortly, curbing his hot temper with an iron will. He would have flown out at the man if he had not had a burning desire to find out all about the girl who was responsible for his downfall.

"Miss Daish, the master's cousin. She live in one of Sir 'Enry's cottages on the Leith road, and she'll live 'ere some day, likely."

"Shut your mouth! Sir 'Enry's sweeter on her than the master," said the other man who was helping to uncharge the coppers. "He give her mother that old keeper's cottage years ago for the girl's sake, and he lets her live there still, though there's many men with families as would be glad to 'ave it. A nice little place it is, and well built, though they don't want a keeper there now since they sold some of the land round. Pity as she ain't married, at least."

"She might 'ave 'alf the neighbrood if she liked," commented the first speaker as he hung on the pulley. "Shouldn't mind 'aving her myself! She's a beauty, she is."

"Yes, you'd look well walking her out!" retorted his mate sarcastically. "It's likely she'd take you on, when she won't 'ave the master!"

Charley's frowning black eyes glanced up sharply, but he asked no more questions and stood in moody silence while the men forked out the waste and flung it through the wooden doors on to the ground below. Exquisite as was the scent of the lavender when in flower it was sickly and medicinal when the very essence was being extracted from the plants, and the boy moved towards the open doors as if mechanically seeking the clean night air outside. As he did so there came a swift patter of feet on the ladder, and Hector's warning growl rising to a full-throated roar of rage at the sight of his antipathy actually in possession of the premises he had guarded heretofore. Some instinct seemed to have brought the dog from the farmhouse back to the distillery and up to the higher floor where Charley was, or, no less wonderful than instinct, the animal power of scent may have told him that the one person he was determined to keep out had entered the old barn in his absence.

The men had just cleared the last of the sodden mass of lavender from the copper, and were lowering the false bottom back for the next charge. Though the hood was off it was still scalding hot in the copper, the boiling steam rising through the perforated floor. Charley had turned with the quickness of a cat at the sound of Hector's bay, and leaving the dangerous position of the unguarded doorway behind him he dodged round the copper, avoiding his adversary by less than a yard; but the dog, more cumbersome

and heavy in his onslaught, could not turn at the same moment, and in his blind rush went too near the edge of the copper and slipped half over, his great body hanging as his muscular forelegs tried to save him with the desperation of a drowning man.

The two farm labourers watched in a kind of petrified horror, expecting the dog to slip back and be scalded to death in a few seconds. They were as slow of movement as of mind, and the thing had been too sudden and too ghastly for their interference. But quick as lightning the boy Charley had thrown himself face downwards at the edge of the copper, and with all the puny strength of his thin arms and little weight was dragging at Hector to save his falling backwards. He had got his hands gripped under the dog's great armpits, but the late injury to his own arm from the lavender sickle hampered him, and Hector's weight threatened to drag them both into the copper instead of out of it. For a second of agonised time they hung there, slipping, scrambling, edging ominously nearer the hot breath of the pit below them—and it was this that John Daish saw as he came back on to the upper floor of the distillery after his brief rest.

He never knew how he got across those few yards and flung his own strength into the balance, hauling both boy and dog out on to the floor and safety. His chest was heaving, and the sweat was running down his face as he knelt beside them, so shaken himself that for the minute he could not speak. Then Hector shook himself, and walked stiffly over to the wall,

where he lay down as if dazed, and the boy tried to scramble to his feet also.

"Good God, Charley! You might both have been scalded to death," said Daish with a quivering face.

"The lad was all right, sir," interrupted one of the men respectfully but quite firmly. "It was the dog slipped over, chasing him, and he clung on and saved his going down."

"And why the hell didn't you come to the rescue and help him? The dog weighs half a ton!" said Daish fiercely.

"It was all so quick like—it hadn't hardly happened when you come in!" stammered the other man. "I thought they was both over in the first flash."

"Small credit to you they weren't!" muttered Daish, turning to look for Charley. To his surprise the boy had left his side and gone to Hector, by whom he was crouching down, fondling the great, square head and jowl. The dog allowed it without any movement but a slight quiver of his tail.

"'E likes me now! 'Im and me is going to be pals!" said Charley, looking up with his black eyes like blots of darkness in an ashen face.

"You saved his life. Hector knows that, Charley."—Daish held out his hand and spoke under his breath that the men should not hear. "I'm sorry for what I had to do this afternoon."

"It's all right," said the boy sullenly. "I cheeked your girl."

"She is my cousin."

"Ain't she your girl?"

"No—not that way."

"If I'd known that I wouldn't have put it across her like I did," said the boy simply. "I was like Hector here."

"Jealous?" A little quiver passed over Daish's face, and some other spasm seemed to grip his heart. Was the little lad getting to feel for him as he did himself? He stood looking down at the two forms crouching at his feet, his face in the strong lights and shadows of the distillery more striking even than by day. A painter would have revelled in the unconscious picture they made.

"Charley, why did you try to save Hector?"

"Dunno," muttered the boy. "He's your dog. I know you love him." He passed his arm fearlessly round the dog's thick neck and patted him. "I thought it might make up—for what I said—this afternoon."

"If you had both been killed?"

"Didn't care."

"I give you my word I'll never lay a finger on you again, boy," said Daish quietly. "Will you try not to deserve it?"

"Better not promise—either of us," said Charley with an odd, upward look. "I'm half crazed when I'm jealous, and I spit up a lot of muck I've heard and forgotten. You might have to hit me, if you wanted to stop it."

"I don't think I should—now," said Daish with a slight, strained smile. "Unless I thought it was the only thing to help you—to keep you off worse.

trouble. But we'll do our best to avoid it. Will you try?"

"Yes!" said the boy with a big breath. "I'll try."

"And you'll be civil to my cousin now?"

"I'll wear the bloomin' baby-clothes she wants to send, if you like," said Charley, and Daish felt that his capitulation was complete. "But I could set myself up so yer shouldn't know me if you'd give me a quid," he added grudgingly.

The corners of John's mouth really relaxed at last, as much with the relief of being friends with his wild protégé as from amusement, and he stooped and patted the thin shoulder as he might have done his dog. For a minute he expected Hector to growl, knowing his jealousy; but the great hound took no notice, and Charley's arm remained round the thick neck. Daish was well content to leave them there while he looked after the distillery with a lightened heart: and when later on he missed the boy he learned from the shift on duty that he had gone over to the stables to bed.

"Time enough, too," said Daish. "We should all be glad to turn in, eh, Tom?"

"Not much chance of that, sir, for the next month."

"When did the boy come into the distillery? Do you know?"

"About ten, warn't it, Jack? He'd bin poking his nose into everything for an hour or so before the dog smelt him and went for him. Lord! I thought they was both done in for a minute!"

"They'd never have come out of the copper alive once they fell in! The bottom's scalding," said Tom, and Daish went very sick for a moment, though his face did not alter.

He was not anxious to have Charley "poking his nose into everything" for the remainder of the time that the great coppers were at work, though he judged that his recent peril would teach the boy caution as no lectures could do. But nothing could keep him out of the distillery. The machinery seemed to fascinate him, and his quickness in mastering work that pleased him was demonstrated rather comically to Daish at the end of those exhausting weeks when the last of the lavender was being distilled. He came into the barn one day about two o'clock after a hasty meal in the farmhouse, and stopped to speak to Jonah, on work again at the furnace. The other men were resting, but there was Charley sauntering about from condensers to separator with a renewed assurance that had been absent from his manner on the first night of the distilling. It was evident that he also was the happier for the reconciliation. Without having seen the master, the impudent little figure, hands in the ragged pockets, strolled over to the condensers to look at the flow-pipe in an imitation of Daish that was for once unconscious.

"When's she over, Bill?" said the boy patronisingly to the resting shift, and the man laughed at the assumed knowledge.

"Coming now, sir!" said Bill Somers with mock deference.

"Off at seven then!" said the boy triumphantly,

and Daish's heart beat with an odd sense of pleasure in his quickness.

"We shall make a Lavender Lad of you yet, Charley!" he said as he walked over to the pipe to look at the flow.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGER LEANS OVER THE GATE

"THERE is no doubt that man is not at his best with the gout! I'm whacked to the world, Thorne."

Sir Henry Leigh looked somewhat ruefully at his swollen and bandaged feet resting on the cushioned stool that supported them, and then glanced with secret envy at the active figure of his guest, who was lighting a cigar with the loving care of the man who has smoked Havanas all his life and treats them with practised nicety. Colonel Thorne was snipping off the end as carefully as a gardener prunes roses, his whole attention concentrated on the process.

"My dear feller, don't apologise to me! I know what the damned thing is. I'm most awf'ly sorry," he said, as he put the cigar between his teeth and lit it, puffing out a little cloud of smoke whose fragrance appealed to him more than the costliest scent that any lady of his acquaintance could purchase from Morny's.

"You don't look as if you ever had the gout," grumbled his host, with a twist of his whole face as the momentary agony took him. "'Pon my word, you look about thirty-five this morning! You might be that scapegrace nephew of yours. What's become of him, by the way?"

"D'you mean Eddy? Oh, he's married and settled down—married Poker Trefusis' daughter."

"But he *was* married!—some celebrity on the stage, wasn't it? They told me so at the Rag."

"That was a disaster, and the girl left him—fortunately. You mustn't judge him from that any more than a Derby horse from its trial. I like old Eddy—he's a good plucked 'un. That beast of a woman hit him hard when she bolted, and he wouldn't show it. He paid out of all proportion to what she was worth."

"I don't know," said Sir Henry, with a sudden thought that surprised his hearer. "I think that when you're settling up accounts for past happiness you are apt to forget what you've had. It's a belief of mine that Providence never overcharges by one dam' farthing. The difficulty is to realise how much it all meant when you come to pay. It doesn't seem worth while—but it was!"

"Yes, and it will be again, next time!" said Thorne with a flash of honesty.

"Ah, well, you've kept your youth. That last speech gives you away. I said you might be about five-and-thirty to look at—now you are feeling it as well. How the deuce do you do it?"

The colonel's good-looking face lit up with the innocent pleasure of a child that hears itself praised. He knew that he was a smart man still, and he knew that he was attractive from the silent comment that he always read in the eyes of both men and women—particularly women.

"I'm pretty fit," he acknowledged, stretching his

muscular arms as if their suppleness pleased him. "But I do suffer from gout. I've been laid up for weeks with it sometimes. It's Hell! But they say that if you have it you have nothing else."

"That's no comfort to me," said poor Sir Henry, shifting himself uneasily in his long chair. "I thought I should be out and about with you by now, and all that confounded doctor has done for me has been to let me come downstairs to lie up like a bally corpse!"

Colonel Thorne's expression was divided between amusement and sympathy. "Poor old chap!" he said. "You'd be happier in bed. But don't bother about me, please. I'm perfectly happy pottering about the place, and having a look at the horses. Your grooms are capital fellers."

"But I feel I've got you to come down here for nothing. Look here, Teddy, do take a gun and go and have a pot at the bunnies with the farmers. You see that I can't entertain you myself."

"I'd rather wait till you're fit to come too—I would really, Harry." Whether Colonel Thorne meant it or no, the grace of his assertion betrayed the sympathy that was almost as quick as a woman's. On the surface he was nothing but a kindly, careless man of the world, with considerably more heart than brains; but he deserved his popularity with his fellow-men for qualities which perhaps the other sex could not gauge.

"But you can see that I shan't be fit this side Christmas!" said his host despairingly. "I'm certain that Matthews is treating me all wrongly. I'll send for a man down from London."

"He'll only charge you fifty of the best for his time,

and not tell you a thing your local man doesn't know. The attack has got to run its course, and the sooner it's out the better."

"Well, anyhow, to oblige me, go and shoot the bunnies. If you don't want to go alone I'll send a message over to Daish. He'll let you shoot over his corn. I was going to ask him to let me come one day."

"Who is Daish?"

"He's one of my tenants; only a farmer, but I'd rather have him than any man round. He's a dead shot for one thing——"

"These farmers are often the best sportsmen."

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't think it's all for sport. He's an odd fish. He made himself a dead shot because he couldn't bear inflicting unnecessary pain on any living thing. If the rabbits didn't eat his crops I believe he'd never kill 'em; but they had to be killed, and he hated traps, and so he trained himself to kill as clean as might be."

Colonel Thorne turned round rather quickly, with a curious interest in his dark eyes. "I like that," he said. "I confess to you, Harry, that I've almost given up shooting because I can't bear killing anything myself."

"Daish will suit you then," said Sir Henry, turning on his chair with a suppressed oath. "I think you are a couple of lunatics myself—but you're both dam' good fellers!"

"Where does Daish live?" asked Colonel Thorne, with the laudable intention of taking himself off his host's hands and letting him rest. He deprecated Sir

Henry being downstairs at all, but it had been most unlucky that on the very day of his arrival the gout should have got its grip on his friend and driven him to lie up.

"He's the tenant of Leith farm—that land on the right of the Leith road; you passed the gate on your way here. It's a lavender farm."

"What?"

"He grows lavender and peppermint, and doesn't do much in stock or other crops. I believe he makes it pay too. You ought to see his fields in flower—they are a sight. But I'm afraid he's reaped them now."

"For the London markets?"

"Oh no—he sells a little in the markets, but the bulk of it is distilled for lavender oil. Drive over and see him, there's a good feller, and tell him I'm laid up and I want him to let you shoot over his fields when he's cutting the corn."

"I'd rather walk—I've had no exercise for days," said Thorne, stepping out of the open window on to the lawn, and drawing his cap down over his eyes. He did not in the least fear the walk in the August day, though the sun was shining bravely this morning; but he was not particularly keen on shooting with a stranger and without his host, and he paused at the stables to have a chat with his friends the grooms, and to look over the horses out at grass for the twentieth time. Colonel Thorne loved horses. He had been a racing man until he found that it is the bookmakers who invariably make the fortunes, and abandoned racing with straightened means; and he had worn silk himself for the honour of his regiment and won more glory

for it than recompense for his own pocket. He had hunted, and played polo, and bred ponies, and the very smell of a loose-box was dear to him, though the fastidious might have turned up their noses. He was thinking more of his friend's stud than of anything else in the world as he took a short cut across the park by the direction of the stablemen, and very naturally lost his way, and instead of finding himself in the Leith road, emerged into a shady lane where the great elms of Surrey met overhead and dappled the ground with dense shade and flecks of sunshine. The light through the branches was so beautiful that Colonel Thorne was content to have lost his way, and he stood still for a moment to appreciate it before sauntering on to the only dwelling in sight to ask for the right direction.

It was a substantially built cottage, with a tiled roof worked in patterns, and casement windows of a newer type than the old leaded panes. Obviously not a very old cottage and more hygienic to live in by consequence—old enough, however, for the ivy to have grown all over its frontage and side walls, and to have invaded the tiled roof. And what a garden bloomed before it, shut in by a low wooden paling that did not hide its treasures of ox-eye daisies, and sheaves of golden-rod, cerise-coloured phlox and small sunflowers, while the hollyhocks grew and bloomed above a man's height, eight and ten feet up in the glad air! The whole place had the cultivated look of a lodge or keeper's cottage, as if it could depend on a substantial patronage, and yet it guarded no gates to the Place, and was a little oasis on the roadside by itself. It was, in fact, the identical cottage of which Charley

had heard the men speak as they trod the lavender and had once accommodated one of Sir Henry's keepers; but, like other landowners, he had felt the necessity of retrenchment and had sold some of his land, thereby narrowing the area of his shooting and rendering the keeper unnecessary on that outlying part of his estate. He had kept the cottage to avoid the possibility of undesirable occupants too near to his preserves, and let it to tenants of his own choosing.

Colonel Thorne leaned over the gate regardless of trespassing. The path to the door was mossy, and bordered by white pinks that were, alas! no longer blooming; but patches of purple and yellow violas, and pink snapdragons, and flame-coloured nasturtiums did their best to atone, and the homelier kind of roses ran riot amongst everything else.

It was the roses that did him service, and brought the picture to perfection before his actual vision; for the door on the left side of the cottage deliberately opened, and a woman came out into the porch with a basket in her hand and a pair of gardening shears. She paused to train back a young growth of ivy with a deliberation that did not appear to see him, and then came into the garden, pushing her way between great clumps of daisies and the golden-rod, and snipping a red rose here and a pink cluster there to fill her basket. There was no hurry about her movements, nor any awkward concealing of herself or her occupation, and he could look his full upon a beauty that he had certainly never seen equalled for all his experience in many lands.

She was very feminine; he decided that in the first

leap of his senses—or perhaps womanly was the word that suited her better. Two great plaits of corn-coloured hair hung over her shoulders to below her waist, and being bare-headed, he could see how rich the growth was above her broad, serene brows. She was wearing a coarse overall or gardening apron beneath which the lines of her breast and hips showed as clearly as if she were swathed. A woman rather than a girl, and yet her soft cheeks had the bloom of open-air peaches, and her firm chin had a little dimple in it like a child's. Her elbows were dimpled too where the sleeves were rolled up above them as if she had been employed in some very simple domestic task, quite possibly in the cottage kitchen ; he could see the little nick in the smooth flesh as she raised her arm to cut a tossing bloom of white Scotch roses. I think it was then that Teddy Thorne lost his heart.

Lillias Daish, having filled her basket with enough roses for the sick lady at the vicarage, became aware of the good-looking man at the gate who was steadily regarding her. She was used to such attention from passing strangers, and trivial requests for a glass of milk, a few flowers, a direction to some mythical place, anything that could open a conversation. If it were an artist he was sure to develop an insatiable desire to make a study of the garden—and herself. Such things were easily disposed of under the guard of her calm dignity. But the gentleman leaning on the gate did not look like an artist. He was not a young man either, as her second glance reassured her, and yet for some occult reason she hesitated to approach him and ask his business. He was standing up now, and raised

his cap with a determination that gave her no chance to retreat into the cottage. So she came towards him tranquilly, with no self-consciousness in her manner or the faintest indication that she knew he wanted to look at her closer.

"Could you direct me to Leith farm?" said Colonel Thorne in his charming voice. "I have walked over from the Place, and I think that I have missed my way."

The sincerity of the statement took Lillias by surprise. He had invented no mythical destination, and he could hardly have mentioned her cousin's farm by happy chance. As he had come from the Place, and was obviously Sir Henry's guest, it was credible that he had an errand to John; and she was suddenly overwhelmed with a most unusual humiliation in having classed him with the mere admiring male who drifted past her gate. She had taken it for granted that this good-looking, obvious man of the world in his smart clothes wanted to look at and speak to her, as the nondescript artists and tourists and Cockney youths did; and he had done nothing of the sort. He had merely missed his way to her cousin's farm with a message from Sir Henry! The peach bloom on Lillias's smooth face deepened to a troubled shame, and her truthful eyes were full of an unuttered apology as she reached the inside of her gate and paused.

"John Daish is my cousin," she said gravely, with those lovely lavender eyes looking full into Colonel Thorne's. "His farm lies on the left of the Leith road. If you walk up this by-lane for a hundred yards you will come to a stream which crosses it underground,

and the road runs at right angles to it. Keep to the left, and it is the first farm you come to."

She had lifted her round bare arm and pointed up the lane beyond the point at which he had entered it. Her attitude was quite unconscious of him, but he wondered why she had flushed when she first spoke, and instantly put it down to an interest in the farmer cousin.

"Lucky dog!" said Colonel Thorne to himself with a very real pang of envy. "I have never seen eyes quite that colour before—or such a mouth—or such a figure" . . . and he heard his own easy tones run through his real thought in courteous thanks for the direction.

"Do you think I shall be lucky enough to find Mr. Daish at this hour? I am afraid farmers are generally in the fields at harvest-time."

"Mr. Daish has very little arable land, for what he has is under lavender or peppermint," said Lillias. "Those crops were cut a week or so since, and the distilling is over."

"It must be very interesting. I have never seen a lavender farm. I should like to see the crop before it is cut."

"It is very beautiful," said Lillias seriously. "At least, the lavender is. The peppermint is only like our garden mint to look at, except that the plants are much larger and darker."

"The lavender must smell heavenly."

"Not when it is being distilled. The oil is so strong it seems somehow sickly. Of the two we like the mint the better."

"Are there many lavender farms about here?"

"Not just here. There are some crops grown in other parts of Surrey, and in Bedfordshire."

"I wonder that more men do not take it up. I suppose it pays, or Mr. Daish would not give up so much land to it?"

Suddenly Lillias perceived that she was being detained at the gate just as other men would fain detain her, though with a skill that it was much more difficult to circumvent. Whether or no Sir Henry's guest had stopped to ask his way in a genuine dilemma, or had made the time-worn excuse to linger, there was no doubt that he was regarding her now with a deliberate intention that he would not have bestowed on a plain woman. And it was causing Lillias an unprecedented embarrassment. Many younger men, and with cruder good looks, had passed across her physical vision with no more effect upon her than they would have had upon a looking-glass. But her first suspicion of him, which seemed unfounded, was merging into a second that he was keeping her there whether she would or no, and making her uncertain of herself.

"It needs a lot of hard work and taking the risk," she said more guardedly. "And Mr. Daish's neighbours prefer the old ways of their farms."

"That is very characteristic of the British farmer," said Colonel Thorne, laughing. When he laughed he seemed about five-and-thirty, as Sir Henry had said, in spite of grey hair and the lines in his face, and it startled Lillias afresh. She half turned as if to go back to the cottage, and he instantly leaned over the gate again, nearer to her. "You have a wonderful

garden of your own," he said. "I never saw finer hollyhocks."

"They have done very well this year, but they will not last another."

"You have to take them up, don't you, or they get diseased?"

"Yes, I think so." She began to wonder helplessly if she would ever be able to leave him. Something seemed to be holding her there against her will—or was it her will that was the traitor? She liked his handsome face and his boyish laugh and his careless, clean utterance, as she had liked no younger man's.

"Is that pink feller fourteen feet high?"

"I don't know, sir," said Lillias, suddenly taking refuge in a form of address that thrust their social difference between them. "I think about ten—I don't know." Her troubled eyes gave him one swift look as she drew back and forced her spellbound feet up the mossy path to the cottage. What had come to her? How could a stranger's eyes, intent though they were, threaten the barriers of her placid indifference? His voice followed her up the path with a different note in it—a lower and more dangerous note, though the words were nothing.

"Can't you spare one of the roses—just one?"

Lillias did not turn, but without the least intention on her part her hand shook the basket that held the flowers and a little red rambler dropped as if in answer to the request. Had she been the veriest coquette it could not have been better done, and her eyes filled with real and angry tears to hear the gate click behind

her and to know that he had taken it as intentional and come into the garden to claim his flower.

"What must he think of me!—Sir Henry's guest, and a London gentleman," said Lillias with genuine vexation. "It was so unfortunate that the rose fell just then; no one would ever think that it was not on purpose."

And for hours afterwards her quiet ordered day was disturbed by a vision of the sunny garden, a gentleman in light tweed leaning over the gate, and the handsome, soldierly face under the golf cap. His steady eyes held her as no man's had ever done before. And yet she did not know if he had deliberately sought the idle conversation through a passing admiration, or if some foolish blunder on her own part had seemed to encourage him to that last swift whisper. For the first time in her uneventful life the long lashes shading Lillias' lavender eyes hid a shamefaced sense of causing a man to misjudge her.

Colonel Thorne daintily stripped the little red rose of its thorns as he walked on up the lane, and pulled it through the buttonhole of his jacket. It was drooping from the heat of the day already as he turned in at the gate of Leith farm and walked up the road between the hedge on one side and the old pond-basin on the other. He was an observant man who seldom or never exercised his brain with thought, which perhaps accounted for his alert look of youth. But for the time being he really did not see the low-roofed farmhouse in its setting of old trees, or the substantial buildings that flanked it, or the soft hazy view of the Surrey hills beyond. His eyes were still dazzled with

the light and colour of a cottage garden, and a woman with bare soft arms and a face that satisfied every sense of beauty. He belonged to a generation that had read Tennyson, and though poetry was certainly not in his line, certain phrases and references had become almost like household words in his more receptive youth, and vaguely recurred to his mind.

> "Half light, half shade,
> She stood, a sight to make an old man young!"

Wasn't that something about the Gardener's Daughter? He remembered a picture in the Academy ages ago of a girl, with this quotation in the catalogue. It was a pretty picture—but not half so pretty as the one he had seen this morning. Perhaps the lady of the cottage was a gardener's daughter.

> "A single stream of all her soft brown hair
> Pour'd on one side——"

Only it was golden, not brown, and in two great plaits. Good Lord! What must it be like, unbound! Her figure, too—

> "And on the bounteous wave of such a breast
> As never pencil drew——"

"I'm growing maudlin in my old age," said Colonel Thorne with a laugh. "That girl is a topper, though. 'A sight to make an old man young'!" And he sighed, half absently, as he knocked at the door in the porch of the farmhouse.

It was opened to him by a blond giant of a man who he instantly surmised was the lavender farmer himself.

He had been somewhat prepared for John Daish's personal beauty by his introduction to Lillias, but he could not keep the admiration out of his keen, quick eyes as he looked up at the farmer. Most men had to look up at John, but it was rarely with resentment. His great gentleness seemed to detract in some way from his size, or to nullify its aggressiveness.

"Mr. Daish?" said Thorne pleasantly. "I've come over from the Place. Sir Henry is laid up with the gout, poor fellow, and he wants to know if you will let me come over and shoot some of the rabbits."

"I am very sorry to hear of Sir Henry's gout," said John with simple sincerity. "I knew of it from my cousin, who had seen his housekeeper, and I should have liked to ride over to inquire after him; but last week was our busiest time."

"With the lavender? I happened to ask my way here at the cottage, and your cousin—Miss Daish?—told me you had been distilling. I wish I had been in time to see the whole process."

"I would have shown you with pleasure, sir. Will you step in a minute? We are slack now in comparison to the last week or so; but there's always plenty to do on a farm."

Colonel Thorne followed his host into the cool, panelled parlour, and threw his cap and gloves on to the table with an air of freedom and good fellowship that made him universally popular. He looked about the homely room with kindly appreciative eyes, and then at John again—and he remembered his swift suspicion that there was a romance between the woman at the cottage and this man with his bachelor

farm. It seemed extremely likely and extremely repugnant both at once. And Colonel Teddy wondered what had come to him and why he was such an ass.

"What a delightfully cool room!" he said. "Phew! it's hot walking to-day."

"Yes, real August weather at last," smiled the farmer. "And we were having a frost at night a week ago. Will you have a glass of beer, or some cider, after your walk?"

"Mustn't touch it," laughed Colonel Thorne. "I suffer from gout like Sir Henry if I am not careful. No, I won't spoil my luncheon with anything, thanks."

"Is Sir Henry very bad this time?" asked John with genuine concern. "I heard he had a guest down, and was surprised not to see him out."

"The poor fellow is regularly on the shelf. I don't think he'll put his foot to the ground for a month. Gout must run its course. He suggested our going out together—you and I, Mr. Daish. Do you think you will be able to manage it?"

"I hope so—yes, I think I can very well, if it is not a whole day's shoot. When did Sir Henry suggest your coming over?"

"What about to-morrow? There's no time like the present."

"Yes, to-morrow would suit me well. After lunch?"

"Won't you come over and lunch with us?"

The farmer hesitated. "I think I had better say two o'clock or half-past, at our sixteen-acre field. I like to see my men started on the afternoon work."

"Very well, Mr. Daish. We are only too glad to be able to get you. I hear you are a dead shot."

"Yes," said John simply. He did not deprecate the compliment at all, but took it with characteristic gravity. He had, as Sir Henry had said, made himself as perfect a shot as possible from humane reasons, and it never occurred to him to deny it. There was a certain broad matter-of-factness about the Daish family that almost made them seem like simpletons to more artificial minds.

When Colonel Thorne rose up to go, after smoking a cigarette, he was on thoroughly good terms with his host; but he admired him physically much more than mentally, though he would have said of himself that he made no pretensions to be brainy. "A good fellow, a trifle dull," he could not help thinking. "I wonder if she is in love with him. . . . Women are so easily taken by good looks. . . ." (He had personal experience of this.) "And she would not see that he was a bit heavy in hand, having no one to contrast him with. . . ."

"If you can wait till the horse is put in I can drive you back," said the farmer as they stepped into the porch. "I want to pass the gates of the Place, and it's a hot walk over the roads."

Colonel Thorne was rather glad to accept, despite his desire for exercise, for beads of moisture hung on his forehead from the heat. While they waited for the dog-cart to come round Daish took his guest across the road and past the potato patch to see what was left of the lavender—the young plants of only one year's growth that had not yet been cut. It was a thinner cultivation than the great bushes in their prime, but even now there was enough blue haze of

flowers and seeds to make Colonel Thorne exclaim in delight.

"The real show must be a wonderful bit of colour!" he said. "Do you do much replanting?"

"We replant every year—in November and onwards," said Daish. "In some years it is well into September before we finish cutting."

Thorne looked over the dainty heads of the young plants which partially clothed the rolling hillside, and recognised the purple glow of a very late clump that had retained its flowers. They were the same colour as Lillias' eyes. No pansy in her garden, or bush of delphinium, so purely matched the iris as did her cousin's lavender fields.

"I am glad I have seen it," said Colonel Thorne almost absently as they turned away.

The dog-cart was standing at the porch with a useful half-bred mare in the shafts and a heavy type of farm-labourer at her head.

"Where's Charley?" asked Daish sharply as he took the reins. "He always brings the cart round. It's his work."

"I haven't set eyes on him for an hour, sir," said the man. "He fed the farm horses soon as they come in, and Jonah he gives a hand dressing 'em, becos it's too much for the boy, and then 'e say can 'e get off to the pool."

"All right," said John shortly, and gave the mare her head; but there was a shadow on his fine face as they trotted up the hot Leith road, and neither man spoke for a few minutes. Thorne was looking for the point where he had left the lane, and wondering

if he could catch a glimpse of the patterned cottage tiles from here, and Daish was wondering what his protégé was about, playing truant again. He distrusted those excursions to the bathing pool, except in the early morning for a bath. The boy was too venturesome, always up to mischief, with a monkey habit of climbing trees and hanging over the water. When he had deposited his guest at the gates of the Place and done his own errand at a neighbour's farm, John drove half a mile out of his way to pass Charley's favourite stream in order to see if he could catch the boy and take him home. The water broadened into the haunted pool some little distance from the rough byway over which John Daish was venturing his trap, and ran away under a slab of granite along the bottom of a neighbouring field. It was here that Charley bathed, and John had twice caught sight of him in the forked boughs of a beech that spread its branches over the meadow side of the water. But no boy was visible to-day, and it was not until he got back to the farm and was stabling his own mare (for the men were gone to dinner) that he heard anything of his tiresome favourite.

Beyond the stables lay the stackyard, and here last year's and this year's ricks were standing side by side. There were peas and beans and straw as well as hay, but the haystacks showed the greatest inroads into their sweet, compact bulk. All were thatched, last year's ricks being in partial demolishment, and a quarter of one cut away so that it formed a shelf of the odorous substance. It was fenced in by hurdles to preserve it from the marauding attacks of envious stock, and

as Daish came out of the stables he was surprised to see Hector leap over the protection and come towards him wagging his thick tail. Daish looked up at the rick to see what could have attracted the dog, and caught sight of a darker patch on the shelf of dun-coloured hay. Charley was lying up there resting on his knees and elbows, and very busy with something which seemed to have been worth the missing of dinner; and Hector no doubt had mounted guard, for his reconciliation to the boy had resulted in a jealous attendance on him. Daish drew nearer cautiously, his hand on the dog's head to prevent his barking, though he had no intention of playing the spy, and to his amazement heard the boy talking to someone or something that he caressed between his hands. His voice was almost crooning as he flattered it, and John, drawn up to his commanding height, became aware that what lay on the shelf between Charley's elbows was a mass of wild flowers—wild clematis and cow-parsley, the pink bindweed and yellow meadow rue—handfuls of them gathered from the meadows and hedges and brought to this hiding-place for some secret purpose or the fear of being twitted by the men.

"Now you lie there, and you there—you dear pretties!" John heard him say. There was neither Cockney accent nor slang in this voice that talked to the flowers. "It's a shame to have taken you from the hedge where you were so happy, but I must have you—I must, must have you!" He bent his black head over the clematis and kissed the trailing sprays passionately. "What do they call you in your flower world, my beauty? We call you Travellers Joy, and

that isn't pretty enough even. Look at this li'l golden fellow trying to reach you—give him a kiss then!" The wild clematis and the meadow-rue touched and twined under the boy's sunburnt hands. He was so absorbed by his flower-marriage that he never heard the farmer slip away with a flushed, excited face, leaving Hector once more on guard.

"Why, the boy is a poet as well as an artist!" he said to himself. "He is like some creature with two souls—one the cunning, lying little devil of the streets, and the other a pure thing strayed out of Paradise. Or is it that the beautiful soul is the real one, deep down in his nature, and merely overgrown by rough and ugly experiences of his life?" The blood in his veins tingled with resentment as he recognised that had one of the men overheard that conversation with the wild flowers they would have ridiculed it to death; or had Mrs. Skelton come upon her pet aversion unperceived she would have said he was touched—crazed—as well as depraved. Even Lillias would have looked with sweet, uncomprehending eyes upon the strange thing, as unnatural and unboylike and in consequence to be deprecated rather than encouraged. Lillias was calmly literal and wholesomely normal. She did not divine genius in anything but the invention of the steam engine. It was the rebel spirit in John that rose up to hail an unexpected trait in the boy's character. And his thoughts found expression almost in Biblical phrase as he went back to the farmhouse parlour and brought his heavy hand down on the sturdy table as if to record a vow:

"I will be to him as a father, and he shall be to me as a son. For he has been sent to me to be the joy that I have missed in life, and I will secure to him that which I have lost!"

CHAPTER VII

BREATH OF EVIL

THE sick lady at the vicarage did not get her roses the same day that they were cut under such embarrassing circumstances, but had to wait until the next morning.

This was unlike Lillias Daish, who, if she did a kindness, did it "with both hands earnestly" as certain Biblical characters did evil. And it was not due to the apparition of Colonel Thorne in her life, either, though it was one that would not be laid like other vague ghosts of romance in her happy, useful days. Lillias would not have allowed herself to day-dream to the extent of forgetting the vicar's wife's request for some late roses for her sick friend; or, rather, a simple habit of duty and routine would have made it impossible for her.

She had intended taking the flowers to Leith Vicarage in the later afternoon, when they had been some hours in water to strengthen them; but at half-past two, when the midday meal was cleared away and the kitchen tidy, there was a loud and undeniable ring followed by a knock on the door of the cottage. For a minute Lillias' heart did give a quickened beat, though the actual vision of Thorne did not form itself in her brain. It was only that her senses had been so unusually

roused to adventure that morning that they had not yet settled down to their normal quiet; and it was with no more colour in her face than its soft sunburn that she went herself along the little passage to the door, since the widow who worked for her was busy with her daughter Alice at the week's wringing and ironing.

In the doorway rather than outside the door stood a stout, fresh-coloured woman dressed in a showy coat and skirt whose bright violet was probably chosen to disguise its cut. On her head she wore an inexpensive hat with elaborate trimmings on the same principle, and indeed there was something cheap and tawdry about this visitor altogether, from her rubbed suede shoes to her handbag, which was imitation leather and looked like it. The encounter was such a contrast to the stranger who had leaned over the gate that morning that for a moment Lillias was stricken dumb; and as she recovered herself in greeting her eyes did not smile, though her lips tried to do so.

"Cousin Sarah Anne! Who would have thought to see you?"

"Not you, for sure, Lily, from the way you stare!" said the visitor with a rather strident laugh. "And John Daish was no better when I saw him down at the farm—yes, I went to Leith first and left my basket, for he's got to put me up to-night. That's what I'm here for—to see John about those brewery shares of mine that his father put me into. The old man was the right business sort. John's a fool compared with him, but I had to see him because I can't find some of the papers and I believe they're at Leith."

"Have you seen John?" asked Lillias, with inward sympathy for the farmer, who she knew to be busy with the corn harvest.

"Oh yes; I had a bit of talk to him while he bolted his lunch—you can't call it *eating*. I like to taste what goes into my mouth and give it a lick round before I swallow it. Then I thought I'd walk up here as Master John said he must go back to work, and oh! the heat! I'd have made him send me over in the cart if I'd remembered it was such a step."

All the while she was talking she was entering the cottage without further invitation from its mistress, making her way into the little sitting-room and taking off her fabric gloves with the "suede finish." Lillias followed her almost in silence. She and John Daish were clannish as regarded family ties, and staunch to the adage that blood is thicker than water. But this was the relative whom they liked least, and whose personality itself somewhat strained their loyalty. Cousin Sarah Anne had been Daish only on the mother's side, and had certainly more resembled her father. Furthermore she had married a publican, and though for some years a widow the faint glamour of the bar seemed yet to hang about her in her full-coloured dress, her decorative hat, her imitation handbag with the gilt clasp. Lillias' feeling of pity for John increased as she realised that he had been taken by storm in the first instance, and raided of hospitality.

"I know that John is very pressed in harvest time," she said in quiet excuse. "Will you take off your things upstairs in my room, Sarah Anne?"

"Oh, don't go calling me 'Sarah Anne' for all the

world like your mother used!" exclaimed her guest impatiently. "A woman doesn't want her christening thrown in her face every time you open your mouth. Call me Annie, as everyone else does—except you and John," she added resentfully, throwing her hat on to the table and her coat over a chair. "I'm too hot to go toiling upstairs."

"Very well. But you will have something to eat and drink. Did they give you dinner at the farm?"

"Mrs. Skelton saw to me nicely, thank you. But I could do with a glass of beer or cider—something cooling—and a bit of cake."

Lillias went to fetch the glass of beer, that was not exactly a cooling drink for one of Cousin Anne's build, and on returning found her putting her crimped hair in order before the oval glass in a frame with flowers and fruit raised in relief upon its border.

"I don't believe you've changed a thing in this room since your mother died!" she exclaimed as she drank thirstily. "Why don't you get rid of all those ugly bits of furniture that don't match, and get a suite, Lily. Something in painted walnut with red or green velvet, and a real up-to-date sideboard? You can buy them cheap now, or you could get them by paying instalments."

Lillias disliked being called Lily as much as the publican's widow did being called Sarah Anne. But she did not say so. She reminded Mrs. Jennings instead that the furniture had been her mother's and her grandmother's, and she would not like to part with it.

"Such rummage!" said Mrs. Jennings heatedly

(the beer was not the best digestive for her, certainly). "And John's just as bad. Two stick-in-the-muds, I call you, and why you don't get married, as you suit each other so well, passes *me!* You're getting past being a girl, you know, Lily, and the men won't be coming round you so much as they used. Why d'you do your hair like that? It's not the way girls do now. Even I'm smarter than you are. My Vera and Olive wouldn't stand me looking as you do!"

There was a touch of bluster in this. In her mind's eye she saw her two daughters, certainly very modern types with bobbed hair and bare necks and arms, for they were never out of the all-conquering "jumper," whether it were cotton or artificial silk. She honestly thought that Vera and Olive were as good-looking and attractive girls as could be, and yet there was a sting in Lillias' unresponsive silence. She knew that Lillias did not admire her younger cousins, though she had never said so; she knew also that John Daish did not admire them either, and the mother in her resented it the more because both girls, and Olive especially, did admire him. Mrs. Jennings would have been satisfied to see Olive married to John Daish, who was inexplicably prosperous in spite of his unusual ways; but she thought, like the rest of the world, that John wanted nobody but Lillias.

What was the spell that Lillias cast over mankind? She sat there with her unfashionable long hair plaited round her head in its richness and colour, with her womanly figure undisguised by the shapeless garments that Olive said were the only things to wear. Lillias was still in her overall, in which she had been washing

up the dinner plates and dishes, and neither excused nor altered it. Mrs. Jennings, glancing slightingly over the pretty face and figure, would fain have denied her any beauty, but that she found all her convictions disproved by experience with regard to Lillias Daish. Cousin Annie was one of those people who measure everything about a woman by a standard of men's preference, and that was usually on the material side. "Men don't like a girl who can't show herself!" she had said. "Men don't care for dullness—men like a bit of freedom with women. Don't be too sharp, Vera. Men will give you the go-by if they think you've got a tongue." It was her objective, in moulding her daughters, that they should be the type of men's desire, not only with the idea of settling them in life, but because she thought that success for women depended solely upon the opposite sex.

"How are Olive and Vera?" said Lillias, ignoring the ill-mannered allusions to John as the greatest lady in the land might do.

"As well as may be, racketing as they do. Girls nowadays get as much into a day as we did into a month. But you are the old type, Lily. I declare you might be my age rather than my girls', and of course you are a bit older than Olive—I forgot that." There was a hasty satisfaction in her tone to give Olive some advantage over her unconscious rival. "Why, you must be thirty, quite. I remember when you were five, and I was a girl at school, myself. You were a pretty little thing then. I don't mean that you've altogether lost your looks," she added grudgingly, "but you don't make the most of them."

"I have other things to think about since mother's death."

"Yes, it must be a bit of a shave for you; but I hear you get this house cheap, and I suppose John helps a bit, eh?"

Then for the first time Lillias flushed a clear, angry red. The frank impertinence of the suggestion touched her through all her simple acceptance of her relation's inquiries into her affairs. Had it been kindly asked she would not have objected even to Annie Jennings' prying, but it was no consideration for herself that prompted the odious question. Her full throat swelled a little and her corn-coloured head went up as she looked full at her visitor.

"John is very kind in sending things from the farm to me as he did to mother," she said in curbed anger. "But I have no need to ask money from him, and you know it. Mother had a bit of property in Carshalton that brings in a little, and I make something by the bees."

"Well, you needn't get so ugly about it, Lily. How red you are! I'm sure John would be glad enough to give you half he makes, and himself into the bargain. I can't for my life see what you are both waiting for, nor anybody else either."

"John and I are not going to marry, Cousin Annie. The idea! I suppose we may settle our own affairs. And I will thank you not to go talking of what is not your business."

Then there was still a chance for Olive! Mrs. Jennings was not sorry for having come within sight of a quarrel if she could assure herself that Lillias was out of the

running. She did not, of course, believe that it was Lillias who would not marry John if she got the chance. For some obscure reason John was keeping his cousin waiting while he made up his mind, and the real cause of Lillias' annoyance, to Mrs. Jennings' narrow mind, was that he would not "come up to the scratch."

"Well, I'm sure!" she said, thinking it her best policy to defend her position. "A nice temper you're showing. One can't make a bit of a joke without your flying out like a screech-owl! And I should think it was anybody's business in the family that you don't get married, with all the talk about you and John!"

"There is no talk about me and John that you and others like you don't make," Lillias was stung to retort. "And it is my business and no one else's whom I marry, Cousin Annie, so if you want to talk to me you'll just please keep off that or I'll ask you to go."

The climax was unexpected, for Lillias' enduring patience was counted upon by her relations. Mrs. Jennings did not want to miss a cup of tea and have to walk back to Leith farmhouse in the heat again, somewhat in disgrace; so she saw fit to apologise and to change the subject, though she took care to plant a sting in it if Lillias were vulnerable.

"Mrs. Skelton was telling me of this new craze of John's for taking in some wretched child that he found in a ditch swarming with vermin." (She used a more literal word.) "He's got a bee in his bonnet, as I always said. I'm sorry for Skelton. I'd get rid

of the dirty brat if I were her, if I had to give him a dose of rat poison!"

"You are talking a great deal of nonsense," said Lillias with sudden coolness, her temper so much at white heat at last that it was like frost. "Charley is farm-boy, and is quite clean and respectable now, and John can engage whom he pleases without reference to Mrs. Skelton, though I am sorry she so dislikes the boy."

"She told me that he stole, and lied, and played all sorts of filthy tricks, and John lets him do just as he likes. I should think there was a reason!" She nodded her head with unclean meaning. "Where did the brat come from? Boys don't turn up suddenly unless they have some claim to come. You look to it, Lily, John knows more of this Charley's parentage than he owns to!"

The stare of Lillias' blue eyes was so amazed that even Mrs. Jennings was for a moment disconcerted. And, as before, she began to justify herself.

"Well, John's not the first who's had a boy he couldn't own to! You might be a baby with that stare-and-see-nothing look, Lily. Don't be such a fool. John's a young man without any wife of his own to go to, and of course he has a woman on the sly. I should say this had been going on for some years, and that's why he daren't marry. How old's this boy?"

"Charley is fourteen or more. He is a little gipsy boy, who has been on the tramp all his life."

Lillias was shocked into the explanation, but the angry blood still burnt in her face and her heart raged

with anger for John. "Did you say all this to Mrs. Skelton?" she demanded.

"No, I never thought of it till now. But that's it, you may depend. I'll have a bit of a talk to her to-night——"

"Annie Jennings, if you dare to say that kind of low evil of John, while you're staying in his house, I'll never speak to you again. And what's more, I'll go straight to John and tell him, and he'll never speak to you either."

Lillias had risen. She was tall for a woman, and the little cottage parlour made her look still taller. Her eyes seemed to scorch Mrs. Jennings' face, for it became more heated than the hot day and the beer had made it. Furthermore, the extreme probability of John's doing exactly as Lillias had threatened filled her with dismay, for if John quarrelled with her, how was she to face Olive? Mrs. Jennings had a wholesome fear of her daughters, if of no one else, and Olive had often rated her for her loose tongue.

"I won't say a word if you don't like it, Lily," she said hastily, almost abjectly, in her desire to soothe the beautiful fury in Lillias' eyes. "Of course I don't want to make mischief. It was out of feeling for you that I was angry with John. Some low woman got hold of him years ago, you may be sure, when he was only a lad, and she's kept him single, and forced him to take the kid off her hands at last. It's a shame! But there, we won't talk of it any more, and I promise you I'll shut my mouth to Skelton."

She was as good as her word as far as her stay at the cottage went, and Lillias knew that if she broke it

with regard to Mrs. Skelton, she herself would soon hear of it and could set matters straight. But the glory of the day had departed, and it seemed to her that Cousin Sarah Anne had poisoned the atmosphere even after her warm violet figure had marched out of the garden gate and faded from the restful green lane.

For a minute Lillias stood in the porch thinking, after her visitor had departed, and her thoughts were unusual ones, for they were less of John than of herself, though she resented the treachery of Mrs. Jennings accepting his hospitality and returning it with vile suspicions. The disadvantage of relationship had never forced itself upon Lillias' mind so much before. There had always been the decent pride in the Daishs that lurks in so many yeoman families who never mistake themselves for the "gentry," but know themselves as something very different to the lower middle-class of town-bred vulgarity. Now it seemed suddenly that she was linked up with them, indisputably connected. She thought of the contrast between her afternoon visitor and the one of the morning . . . and she realised with a stab that Sarah Anne Jennings was blood kin to her, and had a rightful place in her life, while the stranger who leaned over the gate was so remote that she could only vaguely conjecture of his personality. Yet of one thing she was certain—that he would have been incapable of the vulgarity of Mrs. Jennings' attack both upon John and herself, and that in his world people "assumed a virtue if they had it not" and respected the courtesies of life.

Having been prevented going to Leith Vicarage the

same day that she cut her roses, Lillias started early the next morning to save their freshness. Her walk was through the leafy lane up which Colonel Thorne had penetrated a little way beyond the cottage, and led her past some of Sir Henry's land, and by a short cut across the fields to another lane behind the church. It was an old structure with a squat tower and a clock that never seemed to keep time, and it was so familiar to Lillias from a very early age that even the sagging tombstones in the rank grass seemed familiar friends. The vicarage was a straight-fronted, red brick house built in the days of Queen Anne or the first George, and as Lillias walked up the mossy path with its yew trees clipped into strange shapes, she saw between the green peacocks that the sick lady for whom she had brought her flowers had been carried out under the cedar tree on the lawn, and was lying on her couch. She was not only an invalid, she was lame and slightly deformed, and Lillias hardly hesitated before she turned aside and went straight over to the encampment under the tree, basket in hand. For as the sick lady could not come to her, it seemed to her natural and best to save her calling a servant.

"Mrs. Hetley asked me to bring over some of our late roses," she said, setting the basket on the table by the couch. "I hope you will enjoy them. I come from the cottage in Leith Lane."

The sick lady had a little pinched face beneath broad brows that suggested intellect, and shrewd eyes that suggested knowledge of life. She had been reading Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd,"

and had just reached the scene where the young soldier first sees the heroine by lamplight. "Thank you for a sight of such a beautiful face!" he said. The sick lady felt rather as if the words ought to find expression on her own lips as she turned the roses out of Lillias' basket.

"I am very grateful for them," she said, touching the flowers with her small cramped fingers as if she loved them. "I do not know where Mrs. Hetley is just at the moment. She is a very busy woman. Do you want to see her?"

"Oh no—I hoped it might save taking up her time if I brought the flowers straight to you. May I take back the basket?"

"Yes, do. And will you also tell the gardener there to send for a bowl of water from the house for them? You see, I cannot very well get up, and he is out of earshot."

"Yes, of course," said Lillias readily, but having delivered her message to the gardener she came back to the couch as if drawn by some subtle attraction. The sick lady was arranging her roses in a contrast of harmonious colours, and handling them as tenderly as though they were children. Lillias handled flowers carefully too, but that was because they were less marketable if they lost their petals or got their stalks broken. She was vaguely aware that this was a more personal matter.

"I am always so glad to see the roses, and to smell them," said the sick lady, and her voice was quite cheerful, though her next words struck Lillias with sadness. "Every year I wonder if I shall live long

enough to see them again. I understand so well the writer who said:

'I shall not see another spring come sweeping up the world!'

with a little regret in the resignation."

"Oh, but you must not think it is as bad as that," said Lillias reassuringly. "If you look forward to seeing them next year it will do you so much more good than expecting not to!"

The sick lady looked up into the kind, uncomprehending face with her shrewd eyes, and smiled. "Perhaps you are one of those very much alive people who do not like to think that they must die," she said. "I am not. To me, death is only the capacity for infinite rest." Her eyes wandered away from Lillias in her still, material beauty, to the vista of the vicarage orchard where the further trees died out in a haze of shimmering heat.

"I suppose I am very much alive," said Lillias simply. "I have such good health."

"That makes for happiness, and it is natural that you should not think of rest as yet, because you do not need it. You have a good many years before you, I expect. And I hope," she added, touching the roses, "that they will all be as full of kindness as your walk over here this morning."

"Why, that was nothing—a few flowers! Of course I was pleased to bring them when Mrs. Hetley spoke of it. I wish I could do more for you."

"Will you tell me your name?" said the sick lady thoughtfully.

"I am Miss Daish—Lillias Daish." There was a certain unconscious dignity in the "Miss" born of Cousin Sarah Anne's ill-breeding yesterday.

"Then, Miss Daish, do let me remind you (it is only reminding, for I am sure you know) that it is the little things of life that count, the patience that remembers to do a small kindness instead of thinking it not worth while, the everyday monotony of duties that don't make a splash. Just as it is the little stings and jibes that hurt the most," she added significantly.

Lillias' face suddenly woke into the comprehension it had lacked. She could understand that from her experience of yesterday, for she had a slow mind that needed a literal example to make her intuitive. The sick lady's quiet eyes read the lightening of the beautiful face, and she said to herself: "Is it possible that anyone can be mean enough to stab and pinprick this simple, generous woman? I could turn knight-errant for her."

"Some folks seem to *like* being unkind!" said Lillias blankly, but with a subdued indignation.

"Poor souls!" answered the sick lady quickly. "It must be dreadful for them, mustn't it?"

"For *them?*"

"Oh yes. Do think how cramped and petty their minds must be, and how evil. Do you know, Miss Daish, I always think of evil like a very bad smell. People whose minds are impregnated with it must be living in a kind of moral sewer."

Lillias opened her lavender-coloured eyes for a minute, and then she laughed her pretty, gurgling laugh. The shadow seemed to pass from her with that

gurgle of merriment, and the unhappy impression of Cousin Sarah Anne's rudeness. After all, it was nothing but a bad smell. What a funny idea! She looked down at the sick lady, and wondered. And then, before they could say more to each other, the vicar's wife appeared, garden scissors in hand, and introduced a practical mixture of thanks and theology which seemed her element.

"My dear Lillias, how good of you to come over so early when I know you are busy with the house and your little garden. The vicar wants to know if you can pour out tea at the Mothers' Meeting; and the lesson for Sunday School is altered to Matthew—not Hebrews."

"What have the Hebrews done?" asked her sick friend quaintly. "Are they not fit for infant minds?"

"Oh, I don't know—we thought St. Matthew more suitable." Mrs. Hetley hardly paused before she added: "You are almost in the sun, Anstice! I will call the gardener to move you"—and the sick lady's eyes twinkled with a humour known neither to her own friend nor to Lillias.

"More little knidnesses, you see, Miss Daish!" she said, as Lillias took up her basket to depart, having assured the vicar's wife that she would pour out tea for the mothers and remember the lesson for the infants. "Good-bye, and thank you once more for your roses."

She held out her delicate hand and laid it in Lillias' warm strong one for an instant, and her eyes followed the white-gowned figure out of the gate with a musing expression.

"Is not that a pretty girl?" said Mrs. Hetley, seeing

whither her friend's eyes had wandered. "I so much wanted you to see her. They are quite a handsome family. She has a farmer cousin just like herself whom we all think she ought to marry. They are not *first* cousins, of course."

"My dear Meg, you need not assure me of that in a clergyman's family!" said Anstice, laughing. "It is the one piece of common sense that you somehow confound with the rubric. But I do not call her a pretty girl——"

"Not? I thought you could not help admiring her—you, who are so artistic. She has such rich hair —so sensibly done, too. I am quite disappointed."

"She is not a girl at all," said the sick lady quietly. "She is a woman—and I think a good one; and her face is something much more than pretty. I felt as if I must say with Hardy's hero, 'Thank you for a sight of such a beautiful face!'"

"Oh, well then, I forgive you," said the vicar's wife gaily. "And you are right about her character. She is really very nice, and so contented with her station in life and all that!"

Lillias had not felt very contented with her station in life the previous afternoon when Cousin Sarah Anne was making all her world sordid with insinuations. She had felt as if she hated family ties and were decidedly discontented with her lot. But this morning it was different. The cloud seemed to have lifted as she walked to the vicarage on her kindly errand—the little kindness about which people will not trouble, as the sick lady had said. And as to Mrs. Jennings' evil speaking, what was it? Nothing but a bad smell!

Lillias laughed again at the simile, but wondered, with an unusual stretch of imagination for her, if all evil were not, after all, like something repugnant to the senses if it were materialised? The devil, could one face him in reality, would be simply discordant to the ears, loathsome to the sight, sickening to the smell, so that he might well produce nausea rather than the secret hero-worship that people are apt to give him. "The devil's a gentleman," "Lucifer, son of the morning," were all very well; but, after all, evil was nothing but a bad smell.

She had turned aside from the churchyard and walked into the village for a trifling errand before going home, when she saw to her surprise her cousin's bicycle leaning outside the little post-office. She felt sure it was John's because of the electric lamp that she had given him as a present on his last birthday. It was very seldom that John rode down into the village at this hour of the day, when harvest was on. As she paused, the boy Charley came out of the post-office, and seizing the machine was just going to mount and ride off when Lillias laid her hand on his arm.

"Wait a minute, Charley," she said. "I want to send a message to the farm. Is Mrs. Jennings still there?"

The boy jerked his shoulder away guiltily, and seemed half inclined to mount and fly. But something seemed to check him, or else he changed his mind, for he stood still, though he answered sullenly:

"I dunno. Is that the one 'oo come yesterday? 'Er in the saucy violets what don't fit 'er?"

Lillias struggled with herself not to smile. A new

feeling of sympathy and liking for the boy rose in her, partly in revolt from Mrs. Jennings' ugly suggestions, and partly from the fact that Charley had obviously judged her and found her wanting.

"Yes, she was wearing a violet coat and skirt," she said, mastering her amusement but showing one faint dimple. "Has she left Leith, Charley?"

"The old tart 'opped it early," said Charley with an accession of his worst slang. "The guv'nor don't like 'er, spite of her reach-me-downs and 'er suede tootsies!"

"Mr. Daish wouldn't like you to talk like that," said Lillias, becoming grave without an effort. "And he would not let you speak disrespectfully of any of his relations."

For a minute Charley looked puzzled, almost startled.

"She's not an aunt, or a sister, is she?" he demanded.

"No, a cousin—a second cousin or third to both of us—I don't quite remember," said Lillias, though it was no business of the boy's.

"Thought she couldn't be much to the guv'nor—nor you neither," said Charley with a queer uplook in his black eyes. "What's the message?"

"Tell Mr. Daish that they have no self-raising flour in the village and I would be obliged to him to bring me some from Guildford when he's over."

Charley did not answer for a moment. He wheeled the bicycle into the road and seemed to think that he was going to walk with Lillias part of her way. She fell into step beside him, wondering what was going on inside the round black head, and recognising an

odd attraction in the boy for the first time. He looked much more decent and self-respecting in Leslie's clothes, as she had said he would, and though he wore no hat he might have been one of the villagers' sons, save for his gipsy colouring.

They had passed the church and recrossed the fields, Charley wheeling the bicycle while Lillias held open the gates for him, when he looked up at her with sudden confidence.

"If I give your message about the flour, I'll have to say I've bin to the village," he said.

Lillias looked at him in surprise, for she had imagined that he had been sent on an errand from the farm.

"Well, why not?" she asked.

"The guv'nor doesn't know. I pinched his bike and rode in. Wanted some tuck," said Charley glibly.

"Where did you get the money to buy sweets?" asked Lillias gently, knowing that Charley only worked for bed and board as yet.

"A chap give me a tanner for taking a stone out o' the 'orse's 'oof," said Charley. "I learned 'ow with Em'rald and Ruby. It was away on the Leith road—not near the farm." He spoke quite readily, and his story was feasible; and yet Lillias, not suspicious by nature, fancied that he was lying.

"But you can't buy sweets at the post-office, Charley."

"No, I went in there for a bit o' stamp paper."

Again this was credible, because boys were always after stamp paper, though what they used it for Heaven knew. Perhaps the fact that they could get

it for nothing was the attraction. Yet Lillias kept a troubled silence.

"Are you going to split on me?" said Charley.

"No—but I don't want you to do it again. Will you promise not to?"

"I must do it again," said the boy with unexpected honesty. "I've got to get into Leith sometimes. Can't tell you why. But if you don't split we'll be pals!"

A guilty sense of entering into a league that did not even include John beset Lillias; but the odd fascination of the boy flattered her with a confidence from him. After all, she supposed that like other boys he wanted to be off on some adventure, silly enough but so trivial as to be harmless; or, as he averred, merely to buy "tuck," or marbles. The life on the farm was dull enough after his experiences of tramping, and she made a pretty shrewd guess that John himself would shut his eyes to Charley's cool appropriation of his bicycle as long as he could.

"Well—I won't tell on you, Charley!" she said half reluctantly. "But I don't think you're doing right by my cousin after all his kindness to you."

Charley's mobile face twisted with a sudden spasm, and to her surprise his black eyes looked almost tragic. Her shot had gone home, though it was aimed at random.

"I know," he said in a shaken voice. "I know it seems a low-down trick. But there's someone—someone I must let know where I am!" The words seemed to be forced out of him, and the tragic eyes held Lillias' defiantly. "I'm doing no harm—'pon my sacred

oath I ain't—and I won't hurt the bike. I'm trusting you. Don't tell even the guv'nor."

"Why, Charley!" The sudden revelation of the boy's having after all connection with human beings somewhere came rather as a relief than otherwise to Lillias. At least it suggested gratitude, or the fealty to some former tie, and her eyes were very kind and more pitiful as she looked down into the tense face at her side. "You can trust me," she said kindly. "I shan't even tell John. Is it someone who wants you?—who is looking for you?"

"No," said the boy curtly. "But if they know I'm all right they'll let me alone."

"You don't want to go back to them, Charley?"

"I won't!" said the boy fiercely, his little white teeth biting his lip so that the blood came. "I'm going to stop on at Leith. Dunno why I told you so much—but you look as if you'd keep faith."

"I'll keep faith, Charley—and I'll be your friend when you want one," Lillias said with another of those unusual impulses. The boy looked at her with an expression she had never seen in eyes before—a touching gratitude that was half wild and half timid, like a stray dog's. Then he had jumped on the bicycle, and was off down the lane, so quickly that it seemed but a whirr and glitter of the wheels lost in the leafy bend of the road.

Lillias went home much happier than she had gone out. The sick lady at the vicarage had proved the oft-quoted lines:

> "Thou shalt be served thyself with every act
> Of service which thou renderest!"

and she felt as if she had gained a ragged heart in Charley's pact of friendship. She would have been still more touched and amazed if she had known that from that hour the boy was often prowling round her cottage, though unseen by her, setting himself a kind of watch-dog guardianship over her as if he were another Hector. If he saw her at work in the garden or with the bees, he stole away well content, and he never again resented her visits to Leith farm. But that very afternoon —the same day that Lillias had met him in the village— he saw something that brought a watchful look to his eyes and dissatisfaction to his quick mind in his new liking for her.

It was half-past four or five, and Charley, having had his tea, played truant again and wandered across the fields to the cottage, going by a zig-zag route of his own that did not show him on the road at all. He was hidden in the brushwood of the trees opposite to Lillias' garden, when he saw a figure coming down the lane which passed the cottage gate, stop, and unlatch it with deliberate intent. This was no messenger from the farm, or one of the young men of the neighbourhood who sometimes made sheepish errands in the forlorn hope of disturbing Lillias' placid indifference. It was not even a chance tourist or a stranger on a walking tour. The easy, athletic figure with its inimitable air of smartness was the same that had leaned over the gate the day before, though Charley did not know that ; but he had seen Sir Henry's guest at Leith farm, himself hidden, and he lay close in the brushwood and watched.

Colonel Thorne walked straight up to the cottage

door and rang the bell. He was fertile in excuse, but the plausible speech he had meant to make died on his lips as Lillias herself opened the door and looked at him with an unconscious welcome in her deep-coloured eyes. She had never expected to see him again, unless by chance he drove by in the car from the Place; she had schooled herself not to think any more of a man out of her world and the witness of a blunder on her part when she had dropped the rose. And behold! here he was again, debonnair, handsome, different from any man she had ever seen, and making her heart leap with surprise that was almost fear and quite pleasure.

In his coat was a little faded red rose that had once—alas!—been sweet.

"Miss Daish, I wonder if you would give me a cup of tea?" said the charming voice that she had tried so hard to forget. "I've had such a long tramp, and it's so dull at the Place with Sir Henry still laid up!"

His delighted eyes took note of the flush in her face without guessing its cause. And indeed if men could know the real reason for a woman's blush they might very often suffer from hurt vanity. Lillias was thinking of yesterday's visitation, and what this very smart gentleman would think of Cousin Sarah Anne Jennings. She remembered with relief that that lady—in the "saucy violets!"—was no longer at Leith farm, and could not suddenly appear upon her horizon. The flush was for Cousin "Annie" rather than for Colonel Thorne; but he could not know that.

"Will you walk in?" she said simply, and for the first time Ted Thorne stepped over the threshold

and became her guest. They passed beyond the jealous range of those black eyes watching from the brushwood over the road, and Charley drew a panting breath.

"I'll keep an eye on *your* doings!" he apostrophised the inward vision of Colonel Thorne in his tweed knickerbockers and well-cut coat. "She's too good for you—too good for an idle hour, as the others in your life have never been!"

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING THE BEES

At the bottom of Lillias Daish's back garden was a row of neat boxes on small wooden stands, which supplied the staple commodity she took to market, for the vegetables, plentiful though they were, were not more than would supply her little household and leave something over for a neighbour. She sold her eggs when her hens were laying and other people's were not, and she had a great and serious desire for a pig to fatten for market if she had only a little more ground for a pig-stye. But bee-keeping and the sale of honey had been a success from the first in Lillias' hands, and even while she was a girl at school she could always manage the bees better than anyone else when at home for her holidays. Of all God's creation the bees have perhaps the strongest prejudices and affinities, and need the most sympathetic handling. Something in Lillias' quiet, almost ruminating nature must have appealed to the highly-strung colonies, for she could handle a swarm without protection, whereas neither gloves nor veil would prevent her cousin John from being badly stung. No one but Lillias could clip the queen's wings, that she might not fly, without bruising her, nor gather the agitated swarm when they found that their lady was not with them; and she carried a

"cage" in her pocket as naturally as other women do a powder-puff. As far as her means allowed her, Lillias kept her apiary on the most approved modern methods, doubling her stocks, adding supers during the main flow of honey, and giving generous allowance of artificial pollen for the brood raising; but her house was, after all, only a keeper's cottage with a strip of garden attached, and she could not have lived by bee-keeping unless she had launched out in a much larger way. She was fortunate in having much clover in her neighbourhood, and all Sir Henry's rich orchards for her bees to roam over in spring.

The old straw hives would have been far more picturesque in conjunction with Lillias as bee-keeper, but the modern boxes were not by any means ugly, with their low-sloping roofs and odd angles. Lillias was so often with her bees that it was nothing unusual to find her down at the hives one afternoon, about a week after Colonel Thorne discovered her in the front garden; but what was unusual was a certain self-consciousness in her manner, a quick turn of the corn-coloured head that was almost afraid of being watched. If such a word could be applied to her, one might have said that her approach to the hives was stealthy; but it was much more suggestive of a girl's shame lest she should be found out in something silly. And yet Lillias was seldom silly. She might be dull, as John in his impatience had thought her with regard to Charley; she might be a little obtuse, but she was too dignified for ridicule.

She went up close to the hives—closer than anyone who had the least fear of being stung would have gone,

but she knew which were the wicked hives as well as the good, though even the wicked ones could not harm her much, since she had long ago grown immune to the poison of the stings, as bee-keepers do. Bending down her golden head she whispered something into the entrance of the first, and from this she passed down the row, but did not pause to make any examination or to interfere with the business of the colonies. Certain strains are apt to swarm too often and needed watching, for Lillias looked upon her bees, unconsciously, as many people do upon nations. Those which had the colonising instinct might be likened to the British; those like the Americans would not swarm at all, but being a business community produced the more honey! From the depth of the hives came the sense rather than the sound of life—an intimation to Lillias' trained ears that the work of the supers and sections was going on as usual; but she was not really listening to what her bees were saying or doing to-day, for she was too engrossed in what she had to say to them. Some communication of deep importance to herself she must certainly have had to make, or her practical common sense would never have allowed her to resort to the old superstition amongst country folk of "telling the bees" when an event took place in the lives of their owners. Lillias knew, and had laughed tenderly over it, that her mother before her had "told the bees" of her own birth; and she remembered one of her aunts insisting on repeating the ceremony when her mother died. But until now she had, herself, had nothing of such deep import in her life that she had told it to her bees.

As she reached the last hive someone came to the back of the cottage and made a signal to her, and Lillias sprang to her feet with her face flaming. She hurried down the garden path between the neat rows of late peas and little round gooseberry bushes, to discover that old David Adam had brought over a load of wood from the farm to the cottage, for it was a tradition at Leith that the ruling Daish should supply his kinsman or kinswoman with such necessities as he had and they had not. The old man was not of much use in corn harvest, and filled his time with spare jobs on the farm, and errands such as the fuel for Lillias' fires. He unloaded somewhat stiffly, and handed the young lady a substantial basket as well, containing early apples and pears—for the cottage had no orchard of its own—a junket made by Mrs. Skelton herself for her favourite, and some pounds of pale golden butter.

"Thanks, David—tell Mr. John how very welcome the wood is, for we have nearly run short. And thank Mrs. Skelton for me, though I always feel that we ought not to have so much butter when many of the cottagers cannot afford to buy it at all."

Lillias had regained her self-possession, and the red blood in her face had faded again, leaving nothing but the slight sunburn in her ripe face that came of hours spent upon the vegetable garden, where her strong young arms had done their fair share of the work. Whatever it was that she had told the bees was a secret between her and them. Old Adam raised his bent back from storing the last of the wood,

and pushed his cap back on his scanty grey hair to gaze at her with respectful admiration.

"Well, there's a-many things as we oughtn't to 'ave since the war, miss," he said slowly. "But thank God we do!" he added with more cheerfulness than principle.

Lillias was almost betrayed into a laugh, though her sense of humour was not a keen one as a rule. She shook her bright head a little with an indulgent smile at the old man, and called her little housemaid to bring him a glass of ale before he drove his team soberly back to the farm. It was a still, hot afternoon, and the bees were droning happily amongst the flush of bloom in the front of the cottage, too contented with their store to go further afield. Lillias had come round to the porch to speak to David, and for a few seconds more she stood there looking out over the happy, slumberous day with musing eyes and a vaguely happy curve to her lips as if there were a new joy stirring her quiet heart. Yet Lillias Daish was not given to day-dreaming, any more than she was to the superstitious custom of "telling the bees" her secret desires, for luck. The clatter of cups and saucers from the kitchen roused her with a sudden start to her own unusual absent-mindedness, and she flushed that beautiful red again that was quite wasted on the empty afternoon.

"Half-past four, and tea not laid yet! Mrs. Smith will think me crazy," she reproached herself, and turned inside the cottage to undertake her own duties and leave the widow Smith and her daughter to the rougher work. Yet even while she laid the table in

the parlour with an embroidered cloth bought in the market town, and loaded it with too much home-made cake and jam for one, there was a shamed consciousness still about her. The vain little tea-cloth would have betrayed her if the extra preparations for a possible visitor had not done so. Would he come to-day? He had said it was so dull up at the Place now Sir Henry had been forced to lay up entirely, and indeed it did seem a very dull visit for a gentleman who was used to all the distractions of London, and of course had hosts of friends. Ah! that was the depressing point in the argument. Why should a gentleman with hosts of friends in his own world find anything to attract him in the little cottage parlour and the homely tea—even with the vain little tea-cloth and the pretty tea-set that mother had kept so jealously—or the society of a farmer's daughter? It must bore him, even though his manner was too perfect to betray it. No, he would not—could not—come to-day!

As he had come every afternoon since his first introduction to her amongst the flowers, and had coaxed her into permission to invite himself to tea whenever he could slip across Sir Henry's park, a greater coquette than Lillias might have been hypocritical in her doubt. But though she was aware of her own beauty and its weight with men, Lillias Daish was too broad-minded to be vain. She saw certain things in just proportion, and her own station in life and temperament were amongst them. Her cousin John might attract Sir Henry and his friends—they liked shooting with John, she knew. But John had always been able to hold his

own socially from the days of the "good schooling," and the education of which he had taken full advantage. Lillias had learned more domesticity than book-lore, and baked bread better than she spoke French.

It did not occur to her that a man like Colonel Thorne may be even less educated than the yeomanry, despite a public school. After he left Sandhurst, Colonel Teddy made haste to forget all that his profession did not enforce on his mind by daily practice; and since he had retired from the army he had studied little but the racing news and the rules of golf. Women with far more intellectual claims to an equality than poor Lillias had forgiven Colonel Teddy his limitations for the sake of his gay, charming manner, his real kindliness of heart, and the lovable nature that made him and his nephew and namesake, Eddy Thorne, a snare to anything at all feminine.

The kettle was boiling and the tea had waited to be made for a half-hour before the garden gate clicked and Lillias' heart seemed to click in response. Colonel Thorne had said that he would come at half-past four, but he was generally late for appointments, and beautifully turned out when he appeared. He could no more have hurried and been slovenly and heated in consequence than he could have walked into a room before a woman with his hat on. Both actions were disrespectful to a lady—and, besides, he trusted unconsciously to personal appearance to make a good impression. Perhaps he was not far wrong, since a woman's thoughts of a man are apt to resemble a looking-glass.

"I'm so *awf'ly* sorry, my dear—I didn't mean to be

late," he said, holding his hostess's hand and looking into her unruffled face with ardent eyes. Colonel Thorne called most women "my dear," from those who doted on him under coronets to the waitress who made him her special charge in a restaurant. Lillias showed neither resentment nor embarrassment. The kind, fair face was its own best defence in that it betrayed nothing but its kindness and fairness. It was only the bees who were in her confidence.

"I was just going to have some tea, if you will share it," she said, and put the newly-brewed beverage on the table, having just had time to fly into the kitchen and make it between the click of the garden gate and his entrance.

"You haven't waited for me? I shall never forgive myself if you have!"

"I was a little later to-day. A load of wood came over from the farm, and I had to see it stacked." Lillias' womanhood demanded the self-excuse of the white lie and justified it.

"Your cousin sent it over?" he said, very quickly jealous, though his reason had told him a dozen times that there was no sentiment between the comely Daishs.

"John is very good in supplying us with anything from Leith. He always did so while my mother lived, and he does it for me," said Lillias simply.

"I like Daish awf'ly," Colonel Thorne admitted, though he almost wished at the moment that he did not like the lavender farmer, since he could send welcome gifts to the cottage. "I wish I could have had another day or so with the rabbits. Is the corn harvested yet.?"

"Yes, with the exception of the rakings, and one piece of late barley that won't be harvested for another week or so."

"There's always something doing on a farm, I suppose. It's a healthy life. No time to be idle or discontented."

"You can't satisfy yourself with the work only," said Lillias, unconscious that she voiced a great truth. "I think John was wanting something to look to when it was done."

"He ought to marry," said Colonel Thorne with an effort. Then he glanced sharply at the face on the other side of the round table, and caught his breath. He thought he had every line of her beauty by heart, and yet at times she flashed upon him afresh, as if he had never seen her before. Perhaps she had bound the great plaits of hair a trifle more tastefully round her head, so that little folds of the looser hair shadowed her forehead and made her more womanly and less classical. Perhaps some warmth from her repressed heart had crept unawares into her blue eyes and made them deeper and tenderer to-day. He was quick to attribute it to the reference to John Daish, of course, for like most keenly observant people he was not intuitive and he rarely waited to think.

"We are in no hurry to marry in our family," said Lillias with sudden reserve. The softer expression seemed to withdraw itself and leave her face nothing but a serene loveliness of line and colour. "My uncle did not marry until middle life, and my own paretns kept company for ten years, waiting till they had money enough. John is fond of children ,and

he has taken a great interest in a little waif he took in and is training as a farm boy. I think the boy will be a boon to him, though he is a terribly naughty one ! " A sense of shocked disapproval was obvious even through her gentle sympathy for her cousin.

" That won't take the place of children of his own," said Thorne impatiently.

" I think it may. He seems fair bound up in Charley."

" Who is the boy ? "

" We do not know. He is a little waif from London who hid himself in one of the vans and came down to the farm without the men knowing he was there. John thinks he is gipsy born. He looks like it, he is so dark, and such black eyes."

" Daish will never keep him to regular work if he belongs to the gipsies. What age is he ? I have never seen him about the farm."

" He says he is fourteen and over, but he looks barely twelve, he is so thin and slight. He had been very ill, and in a workhouse infirmary before he came here, and John will not have him do any heavy work. It is spoiling the boy, if he is to be really trained for the farm. As like as not Charley was off playing truant when you were over at Leith. He has run away once or twice, but John brought him back."

" What a curious fancy for a man like Daish ! I should like to see the boy."

" Tell him so. It will please him." Lillias stretched out her warm, sunburnt hand across the table towards her guest's empty cup. " May I give you some more tea ? "

But the innocent offer was the spark to kindle a fire they had both discreetly shielded for a whole week of summer weather and propinquity. Teddy Thorne had not the least intention of offering any familiarity to his hostess when he entered the pretty, sweet-smelling parlour. Beyond giving him tea *tête-à-tête* he had never received the least encouragement from Lillias Daish, and he would have said that he respected her far too much to attempt a flirtation beyond the careless flow of debonair gallantry that he affected with all women. He thought that she kept him at a distance and frightened him a little. And yet, seeing the open hand stretched out to him, helpless, as if asking for something, the blood suddenly flew to his good-looking face, and bending his head he had kissed the smooth palm before either of them could recover themselves.

His hands closed on the girl's arm before she could draw it away, and he held her so, looking deep into her eyes with his own dark with passion.

"Lillias—I ought not to come here—I ought to have gone away days ago!" he said.

"I thought—you were here for the shooting," said Lillias blankly. In moments of the strongest emotion the slow, Daish brain was apt to take refuge in obvious statements. They might suffer like the brute creation; they were nearly as inarticulate.

"I should have left last week when I found how ill Leith was," said Colonel Thorne recklessly. "I have made excuses to stop on, until I wonder if he suspects me. You know why I have stayed, my dear!"

The blood rose slowly over Lillias' wonderful face,

until it seemed to draw tears to her eyes like the dew on the lavender. The man and woman looked at each other as if they knew how hopeless it was. She never protested that she had offered him no least inducement to stay, because she knew that in her heart she had most ardently desired it, and that seemed to her culpable enough. Fate had very cruelly left her serenity undisturbed by a host of suitable lovers, to waken her heart at last for this smart, clean man of the world, many years her senior, Sir Henry's friend and equal, out of her sphere and her life together. It was an incongruous tragedy.

Very slowly she tried to draw her hand away, and when his grip prevented her she waited patiently until he should release her, but there was no yielding in her patience. It never occurred to her to take refuge in subterfuge, to say she did not understand him or to pretend resentment. She accepted the two bare facts as she saw them—that he was offering her love of some sort, even if undeclared, and that their positions made anything further impossible.

"I think—you had better leave me," she said with difficulty.

"I will if you send me away. You don't care a little bit for me then?"

"I think—you had better go."

He knew he ought not to press her further; he had no right to speak of such a serious thing as love, and yet it was of too real moment to him to laugh it off as he would have done with another woman, and to treat it as a passing flirtation. Hurt vanity betrayed him into inflicting a wound that he did not know he

gave, as he pushed back his chair roughly and rose.

"I see it is nothing to you if I go or stay. Forgive me for kissing your hand. You need not grudge me that—it hasn't hurt you."

Perhaps the light was getting low in the shady parlour, or perhaps his own eyes were a little dim with self-pity—the most usual reason for tears; but if he had seen her face clearly he would have recognised a pain much deeper and slower than his own easily roused emotions. To Colonel Thorne the past week had been amazingly short, gauged by the growth of his own feeling for the still, beautiful woman who seemed to him unmoved. To Lillias it had been amazingly long, because it contained the whole of her first experience of love.

He held out his hand to her in silence, but as she put her own into it he looked what he meant to be his last at the beauty that had rendered him helpless despite all his experience of life and the selfishness of his self-control.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said huskily. She had always been attracted by his voice, with its clear utterance and the cultivation that no modern habit of slang could alter; but it had never set her pulses throbbing as it did now. "Forgive me if I have troubled you. You are quite right—I had better go. Don't look at me—don't come with me."

She had made a movement as if to accompany him to the cottage door as she always did; but she drew back, still silent, as he spoke, and stood by the useless

tea-table with its pretty china and home-made dainties, until he had passed out of the room. It was only a few steps to the cottage door—a short walk down the mossy garden path between the gay flowers—then the gate clicked as it had clicked at his coming, and he was gone.

It was the sound of the gate that made Lillias realise what had happened in the last quick five minutes. Her thoughts were slow to arrange themselves, and she was unused to intense feeling of any kind. But the finality of it smote her all at once into ugly pain. He had come and gone in her life—a stranger, asking the way over the garden gate ; a lover unavowed, stealing the content from her days and the placidity of ignorance. She looked round the little room, which had suddenly become too narrow for the painful experience she had known, and wondered if her life would ever fit into the old groove again, whether the pleasure of her youth and health and the duties of every day would ever satisfy her now. . . . Then, with slow care, she began mechanically placing the tea-things together and folding up the embroidered cloth that had been so carefully chosen—for this.

"We neither of us ate a good tea," said Lillias slowly to herself. "I had better ask Mrs. Smith and Alice to finish the cake." . . . Outside in the garden she could hear the low drone of the happy bees still busy amongst her flowers, and she remembered how she had gone to the hives and told them of her secret love, for the first time in her life. She had been half ashamed of the old custom even then, but her fear of endangering the elusive thing had made her super-

stitious. If one did not tell the bees the great events of one's life they might be angry, and ill-luck would follow, while they themselves deserted the hives. Now it all seemed too childish even for shame. He had come and gone, and there was nothing more to tell.

Colonel Thorne walked out of the sunny garden without in the least knowing where he was going. He turned to the right mechanically, and followed the road to the little bridge because he had gone that way before. The lines between his eyes seemed to have deepened, and they were puckered at the corners. He was an elderly man, and he realised it as he seldom had to do, because he was vigorous and full of the joy of life, and his charm for men and women had not failed him. But he felt suddenly dissatisfied with himself, and aware that he had undergone mental pain for no corresponding satisfaction. A woman of Lillias' age was out of his reach, without counting her unusual beauty. He had been a fool to become infatuated, and could expect no return, even if he had been in a position to take her heart by storm and marry her. He did not want to marry a girl in that position, even though John Daish was sufficiently unique to pass muster anywhere, and she seemed to have no nearer relations. (This was true, but he had never seen Mrs. Annie Jennings, who, though a still more distant cousin than John, was enough of kin to be a very grave drawback to a man of Thorne's type—the "bad smell" of evil indeed!) But, anyhow, he did not want to marry at all, and had no intention of doing so. The moment's rash impulse had ended satisfactorily, as his reason told him, and the sooner he left the

Place and got himself out of danger the better. It was all for the best, after all, and the girl had cared nothing for him beyond a passing kindness that he was almost mistaken into thinking was tenderness. Reason, caution, common sense echoed: "It is all for the best!"

Only, unfortunately, the heart in his broad breast was neither reasonable, cautious, nor filled with common sense. It cried out that he had missed his mate, and that material considerations mattered very little to the discomfort of a yearning that would not be appeased.

He walked along the empty fields where the men were cleaning up the rakings, and without noticing the direction he was taking found himself at the gate of Leith farm. Here he turned aside abruptly, directly he recognised where he was, being in no mood for more of the Daish family at present. There was a gate into some of the Leith pastures, however, a little farther up the road—the same in which John Daish had found the boy Charley when he was running away, and brought him back—and Colonel Thorne turned in here and walked along under the high hedges, absorbed in his own thoughts to the exclusion of his direction, save that instinct told him he was going on the homeward way to Leith Place. Those wise counsellors, Caution, Reason, and Common Sense, were very busy refuting the rebel voice of his heart that dared to speak of Love.

Caution said: "You do not know what lovers the girl may have; there must be some favoured swain—and you are a jealous man. It would be intolerable

to you if she smiled on a younger admirer, or had had affairs in the past. And what can you expect with that face ? "

But Love said : " You have only to look at her clean, frank beauty to know that she is as true as steel. If there were another man she would tell you. But if it were *you,* you would rest content to the end of your life."

Common Sense said : " The marriage is impossible. You belong to different classes, and she would jar on all your habits and instincts."

But Love said : " She is quick to learn. And are you so refined yourself, so intellectual or well-educated that you want a brilliant woman for your wife rather than a helpmate ? You are nothing but the racing, slack-moraled, free-tongued type of man whose knowledge of everything but the world is slipshod. Why, you are hardly fit for *her,* even from a social standpoint."

Reason said : " Pack up your things to-night and tell Harry Leith you are bound to get on to Scotland to-morrow. Have done with this folly ; the grouse are really more worth having to a man of your stamp than Lillias Daish."

But Love said : " Her eyes are the colour of the lavender !"

Colonel Thorne sighed impatiently, turning his handsome head restlessly as if in pain. And as he made the pettish movement he became aware of a figure sauntering towards him, as absorbed in something in the hedge as he had been in his own thoughts, so that they were within a few yards of each other before he

or the person approaching him recognised the other's presence. The boy—for he instantly concluded that this was Daish's protégé—was neatly if somewhat shabbily dressed in short knickerbockers and a dark blue jersey that showed his tanned neck. He wore square-toed boots and stout gaiters like any other farm boy, but his round black head had no covering save its thick hair. His face was as tanned as his neck, but as he came closer to Colonel Thorne it turned almost livid, and the great black eyes narrowed with the desperate fear of some animal about to fight to the death. For the minute the man and the boy stood still within a yard of each other, staring with a tragic recognition, and the peace of the August evening had suddenly become the hush before a storm. Then Thorne came a stride nearer, stretched out his arm and caught the boy's shoulder in a grip that there was no escaping.

"Charley!" he said, lowering his voice instinctively. "What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER IX

THE BOY AT BAY

"WHAT is that to you?"

The boy and the man stood staring hard into each other's faces as if their recognition were still an incredible thing to both of them. Thorne's keen, observant eyes were searching his prisoner from head to foot, as if something in Charley's appearance puzzled him for all his certainty of itsidentity. The slight figure upon which he retained his hold had grown rigid, and in the great black eyes that never fell before his own was a savage desperation that seemed to voice itself in his repeated challenge:

"What the hell is that to do with you?"

Colonel Thorne's face suddenly relaxed from its first sternness, and something like pity came into it instead. His grasp upon the thin shoulder slackened, though his hand rested there still.

"Come, that's not the way to speak to an old friend," he said more gently. "We don't need to rag each other, do we? I am not interfering with you, but I want to know how it is you are here, and what you are doing. For the sake of old times you might tell me."

The boy could perfectly well have twisted himself

out of the man's grasp now, and got away; but he did not do it. He stood there instead, as if half petrified, and his eyes still met Thorne's with that miserable defiance.

"I'm on a farm here," he said, half furtively and below his breath.

"Daish's?"

"Yes——"

"You are the boy in whom Daish is so interested?"

"Yes——"

"I was afraid so."

"For the matter of that, what are *you* doing here?" retorted the boy sharply, his brows contracting in an ugly fashion above the distended eyes.

"I am staying with Harry Leith."

"Game-leg Harry!—I feared something of this sort when I heard he owned property about here. Thought some of the old crowd might be coming down—but I never thought of *you*, till lately."

"Didn't you know we were friends? You *must* have known."

"No, I never saw you together. He came with the Lexiters and Lady Harbinger and that little lot." There was no Cockney accent in Charley's speech now, and yet he seemed slipping into an equally familiar slang—familiar to Colonel Thorne as well as himself.

"How long have you been here?" asked Thorne abruptly. "Can't you take me somewhere where we can talk?"

"About a month, or six weeks. No, we must talk here if you *will* talk. But you'd better let it alone, I

warn you!" There was menace in the lowering brows now.

"Nonsense. Of course we must talk. I can't leave it like this—it's monstrous! How do you manage on the farm? You can't live amongst the men."

"No, I sleep over the stables, in a loft." A flicker of wicked amusement lifted the gloom of Charley's face for a moment. He looked at Thorne with a flash of white teeth, to meet the incredulity in his face. "I've got the hay for a bed and an old blanket. If it's cold I pull the hay over too. You just try it! It's better than a bedroom at the Ritz. Ah! I sleep sounder there than I have for many a long day!" Then for the first time his wild eyes left Thorne's face and sought the evening sky, growing splendid with sunset behind the belt of trees that hid the farm from the meadow where they stood. Rose and purple and pure gold, the gorgeous colours ripped up the seraphic blue of the August evening, and into Charley's face came an infinite regret.

"Was that why you left London, Charley? I heard you were ill, and having a rest."

The boyish figure shivered slightly as if with cold.

"Sort of breakdown," he said. "And then 'flu. They kept me quiet—too quiet. It began to drive me mad. Then one night I went out on the old lay—you know. But I felt all tottery, as one does after 'flu, and I saw one of the lavender vans from the farm here and got into it, because I had to lie still or I should have dropped. I think I was a bit light in the head still but I fell asleep under some mats—they call them

archangels down here—and when I woke we were jolting out of Covent Garden. So I stayed where I was, just to see the thing out."

Thorne nodded. "Yes, the escapade is just like you, so far. Go on."

"I didn't mean to stay, of course. I meant to get out of it when I'd had my fun. But I was dead beat, and I found some fodder in the distillery over there and slipped in and meant to have my sleep out. And then—then——"

Thorne's intent eyes read the changing face before the unready words could come. Something seemed to alter in the boy. He turned white under the tan of his gipsy skin, and two great tears welled up and hung on his thick lashes with unconscious effect.

"And then you saw John Daish," said Thorne deliberately.

"He came and found me, to save my being mauled by their guard-dog. Hector hated me for a while, because he was jealous. But I saved his life one night in the distillery, and he never forgets. I wish he were here now!"

In a flash the fierceness had come back, the black eyes burned like coals, and the little white teeth were bared like a wolf's.

"Why? Do you want to set him on me?"

"He'd kill you if I told him to!"

"But I think you wouldn't tell him to, Charley," said Thorne gently, and the anger died out of the boy's face, leaving a sullen shame.

"You want to drive me away," he said resentfully. "I know you do, though you haven't said it. Why?

You don't care what I do. That's all done with—why shouldn't I stay?"

"I like John Daish, Charley. He's a good sort of man, but he won't understand—you. Or forgive you either. When are you going to own up?"

"That's my business."

"No, mine."

"You'd best not interfere. You're not here for the shooting, yourself. I've seen you hanging round the cottage where a certain young woman lives, day after day. Are you any better than I am, if it comes to that?"

The short sharp sentences pelted Colonel Thorne like blows, and for the minute he had to draw breath, quick though he was in self-defence and excuse.

"That's rather a different thing," he said, and his voice was a little slower with the drawl that always came into it to resent an impertinence. "I am not sailing under false colours. My visits to the cottage, or anywhere else, are perfectly aboveboard."

"You wouldn't altogether want them known in the neighbourhood, though!" said Charley with reckless shrewdness. "You let me alone, and I'll let you alone."

"You've overreached the mark this time. I'm going away——"

"Rather late for a fit of conscience from Teddy Thorne!"

"But before I go either you or I will tell John Daish," said Thorne firmly. The colour had come up into his handsome face for a minute, but that was all there was to tell that Charley's gibe had gone home. "I

wonder that he has not suspected. Has he never heard of a certain Carlotta Edison of the Variety stage —the most wonderful impersonator of the London arab that ever took the public by storm? He must see the papers sometimes, even if he has never been to the Palace."

"He didn't recognise me," panted Charley, and the dark eyes were piteous with pleading. "I tried it on him to see. There was a picture in the *Graphic*— I pointed it out to him, and told him that girl imitated boys like me!"

"The deuce you did! You have a nerve, Charley."

"It meant nothing to him—he'd never seen me. Even if he had I could have bluffed it. I've played the part as I never played on the stage—played it for six weeks—because—because of John Daish. Oh, don't drive me away—don't! don't! Teddy—for the sake of old times—let me stay a little longer!"

The boy was all gone in a moment. There was nothing but a woman in the little hot hands grasping Colonel' Thorne's and the great eyes full of the hunger of a lawless love. It shook him, man of the world though he was, perhaps the more for coming so soon after his own emotion and the bitterness of renouncement. His eyes were very kind as they looked down at the round black head and the expressive face that were, alas! so familiar to him and to other men.

"What's the good, Charley dear? He must know some time. And I warn you that the longer you keep it up the more angry he will be. He is growing to care for you—he doesn't know why, but when you tell him who and what you are he will feel himself

tricked. Those slow, quiet men can be very angry. Take my advice—don't let him know at all, if you have any feeling for him yourself, but run away again and let him think you've gone back to your tramping life."

"I can't, Teddy. I love him too much." She pressed her sunburnt hands to the woman's breast under her boyish jersey, and rocked her body to and fro with a little moaning sound. Thorne had known her in many moods, undisciplined and passionate and full of the temperament of the artist; but he had never seen her like this before. He laid his hand on the black head tenderly, and his voice was a little husky again from sympathy.

"Then you must tell him, Charley."

"If I do he will send me away!"

"I am afraid so."

"Oh, give me time," she moaned. "Time to make him care for me so that he can't. That's all I want—a few weeks longer."

But she saw no final yielding in his face, only pity, and with a quick change of manner she flung his hand off, bursting into a wild hysterical laugh that had something ominous in it.

"Very well, do your worst, Teddy—and I'll do mine!" she cried. "*You* are not the one to judge me, or to tell me what I ought to do—you, who . . . I'll beat you on the post yet, old sport!"

She sprang past him, as quick as the boy she personated, and was gone in a flash, through a gap in the hedge and up and over the next field. Colonel Thorne did not attempt to follow her, and after a few minutes

she doubled, and creeping back through a dry ditch kept him in sight, though he did not know it. If he took the way to the farm now she must devise some desperate scheme to stop him—but fortunately for himself his own thoughts were too much in a turmoil to make it advisable to go and see John Daish on the instant, and the girl watched him pause to light a cigar and then return to the road, smoking it.

Hiding behind hedges, and creeping through the rich undergrowth of the summer, "Charley" (she had always been Charley to the public rather than Carlotta) stalked her prey until she saw him enter the gates of the Place, and then with momentary relief she knew she was safe for this night at least. There was no saying what he might do on the morrow, and her burning brain began devising the means to frustrate him, hardly stopping short of wickedness in her extremity. At all costs he must be stopped from seeing John Daish before he left the neighbourhood, if indeed he were going. She did not much believe in his resolution, having known Teddy Thorne at his worst and most self-indulgent, and not recognising that a nobler influence might bring better results. If we look for garbage in men or women we usually find it, and it seems a miracle that others should discover jewels in the ash-heap we have been raking.

Charley's feverish mind seized on and dealt with the most probable dangers that threatened her in Thorne's arrival at the farm, until her mentality became almost unbalanced and she was in the mood that Daish had seen when Mrs. Skelton had struck her. Little short of murderous he had thought her then; little short

of murderous she was now. Suppose Thorne walked over to the farm as he had done to-day: she would loose Hector and set the dog on him. Hector would do anything now for her urging. But if he rode, as he usually did, it was more difficult. She put her hands to her hot head and thought. . . . What was that that had happened to Lady Harbinger in the Park last year, when she had an accident? . . . Some Boy Scout with a pole—was that it? . . . Yes, a Boy Scout, flourishing one of their long poles—and the horse had taken fright and bolted amongst the plane trees running down the Mile. That had been an accident, but. . . . A wicked trick if done on purpose—it might mean a bad fall. Lady Harbinger had had her leg fractured in two places . . . and Ted Thorne was by no means a young man. . . . The blood beat in Charley's temples and she caught her breath with a fierce sob.

"Well, don't let him drive me to it!—it's on his own head," she said, and made a gesture such as Pilate may have done when he washed his hands before the multitude, saying: "I am clear of this blood!"

CHAPTER X

KISMET—IT IS DESTINY

It was not in Colonel Thorne's nature to be intentionally unkind. He had no doubt caused as much secret unhappiness as other men of his type who never turn aside from the gay adventure, and make love with as neat an instinct as they knot their ties. But at least he had never done a woman deliberate harm beyond that prompted by male instincts—which cannot be called deliberate—and as he walked steadily homewards to the Place he decided that it was not his business to unmask Miss Carlotta Edison if she chose to play the farm-boy, much as he deprecated the escapade. In his heart he had never meant to betray her identity to Daish; but he wanted to frighten her into a confession, herself, or to induce her to run off again without enlightening the lavender farmer, and to vanish out of his life as mysteriously as she had come into it.

This was, to Colonel Teddy's mind, the better plan and much the more pleasant. He judged rightly of John Daish's temper if he found that he had been tricked; and if his heart were set on the supposed boy it seemed kinder to let him think that Charley's roving instinct had proved too strong for any home ties, and

that he had gone back to his vagrancy. Why should Daish ever know? He did not care for London or its amusements, as Thorne had discovered in their desultory intercourse while rabbit-shooting. If he went to see anything it was a good play, and Carlotta's vogue was strictly confined to variety shows which would never attract him. Her very notoriety and much-advertised name were her best disguise, for John Daish would not dream of connecting Carlotta Edison the mimic of the Halls with his lost street arab, though the London boy was her best-known reproduction. Yes, it was certainly best that she should quietly disappear from Leith farm and return to the life which she had suddenly dropped; and Colonel Teddy, from the depths of his kindly, selfish heart, devoutly hoped that she would take his advice. Carlotta Edison—little Charley Edison!—could there be anything more incongruous than the association of such a girl with John Daish . . . unless perhaps it was his own with Lillias? . . .

Colonel Thorne was in an unusually sober mood that night at dinner. Sir Henry was still upstairs, but his agent had been called in to keep his guest company, and being a pleasant young fellow and a good sportsman, had proved adequate to keep the table lively and the butler in suppressed but appreciative mirth between his tales and the colonel's. Few men had so large a collection of stories as Teddy Thorne, or as unmentionable in general society. But on this, his last night at the Place, his wit almost dragged, and even the rusty-coloured port did not mellow his tongue. Mr. Simons, the agent, wondered what was the matter with him, and thought the heat of the

day must have tried him, wiry though he was, for he was an elderly man when one came to think of it.

"I think you walk rather far, sir," he said, when Thorne excused himself by reference to a long tramp through Daish's fields. "It's a bit too much in this heat. Why don't you use the horses? They are doing nothing most days, and Sir Henry would be delighted. He always keeps two or three in the stables instead of sending them all to grass, and I can't give them all work."

"Thanks—but I'm leaving to-morrow," said Colonel Thorne, and he thought of a face that he did not mean to see again, with braids of corn-coloured hair and lavender eyes. . . . "There's no fool like an old fool!" he added in his heart, while the agent expressed honest regret.

Nevertheless he did not leave in the morning as he had intended, on account of the heat. Breakfast was always late at the Place, and by the time that he could get off it would be the hottest period of the August day. Better take an afternoon train, said Mr. Simons, and Colonel Thorne acquiesced, rather annoyed with himself for having missed the quicker express that took business men to London in the early hours. Here he was held up for a whole morning, after all, with that damnable memory of a sunny garden full of light and flowers only a mile or so away; of the cool shady parlour, and the face he must not see. . . . But why not, so long as she did not see him? What was to prevent his taking Simons' advice and riding about the country a little to fill in the time? Not nearly

so hot as walking—and if he passed by the cottage once more it could not harm her. . . .

A man of Colonel Thorne's age who is even passingly in love is far more sentimental than most younger men. He really had no intention of speaking to Lillias, hardly any desire to do so—but a foolish impulse drove him to ride past the cottage once more, and if fate willed it to catch sight of her amongst her flowers. He was just as likely to see her cutting the vegetables for dinner, or attending to her bees, in her practical round of commonplace duties, had he realised it ; but he had a fancy that his first picture of her in the garden should be repeated at the last, and not that distracting memory of something bordering on a tragedy which belonged to the moment of parting in the sitting-room. Whenever he thought of it he almost wondered if she had cared for him—but the thought was ridiculous, considering her calm demeanour and the short space they had known each other.

He had always made himself popular in the stables, with a horseman's real knowledge of his subject. The grooms were keen to show him that the Place could mount him well, and urged him to take the cob for an hour—a mouth like velvet, and a nice ride. The animal was very fit, in spite of the heat and the time of year, and in hard condition. Colonel Thorne, cantering easily down the park, found that he pulled a bit, and wished that he had chosen the lazy mare that the groom contemptuously compared to a funeral. " Mr. Simons he likes to take his time, sir—he lets her go her own pace. You'd better have the cob." Thorne would have preferred to go a slower pace also,

for it was hot even in the saddle, and he had his own thoughts for company.

He made his way out of the park and through a gate into the rough land where he and John Daish had gone rabbit-shooting. Here he had to hold his mount for fear of the warren, and he turned aside into the small spinney that bounded the familiar shady road, rather thankful for the shelter from the sun and the necessity of going at a foot's pace. He could push his way out of the spinney a little further down the road, and ride back past the cottage, and so home by Daish's pastures. He was within a yard of the road, but still in the shadow of the plantation, when something rushed out of the undergrowth, flourishing what looked like a long pole right under the cob's nose. It was in vain for the rider to shout "Look out!" or to catch up his rein. The cob swerved as quickly as any polo pony, turning as if on his own axis, crashed past a tree and, finding himself free of his rider a second later, took the low hedge in perfect style and galloped back to his stable.

Colonel Thorne had fallen because his leg was broken. The cob had allowed for his own body to pass the tree, as horses always do even when maddened by fear, but had caught the man's knee against the trunk and snapped it as neatly as any ju jitsu wrestler. For a few minutes there was nothing to be heard in the hot morning except the sound of galloping hoofs dying away into distance. Then the undergrowth rustled again and that "something" crept inch by inch to the fallen figure, the pole that had wrought the mischief in its guilty hand. With eyes still reckless and desperate, Charley looked down on the disaster

she had caused, not yet repentant, not even alarmed—only aware that she had stopped Thorne riding out to Leith as she supposed he intended, and betraying her to Daish. He would not be likely to interfere in other people's lives for the present, having something of his own to think about!

Then her heart smote her. He lay so very still! Some memory of remote kindness for the handsome face lying at her feet rose in her mind, though it was so remote as to be nothing but a memory. She stooped lower over him, and his dazed eyes opened and looked at her, dark with pain.

"Charley—you little devil!" he said faintly. And then: "Don't tell anyone what you did, or you'll get into trouble. Go and get help—my leg's gone."

Charley had sprung to her feet at his recognition of her, but instead of answering she stood listening, her body braced as if with fear. "There's someone coming now!" she said, and made off into the undergrowth with the quickness of a wild cat.

The sound of the cob's uneven gallop had told its own tale of a riderless horse, even before it passed the nearest dwelling-place. Lillias Daish was in her bedroom upstairs, superintending a thorough "turn-out" by her little housemaid, when the pace of those hoofs struck on her ear and sent her to the window with some presentiment of disaster. She recognised the animal, as people who live in one neighbourhood do recognise every beast upon the roads, and saw that it was heading back towards the Place. But who—who had been in that empty saddle?

"Quick, Alice—there's a runaway horse," she said. "One of Sir Henry's—the cob the agent sometimes rides." She did not know why she said that, unless it were to still her own fears.

The girl ran after her out of the room and down the stairs, gasping out questions: "Did you see it, miss? Who's hurt? Is it Mr. Simons?"

"I don't know—the horse was riderless," said Lillias as she ran through the garden without waiting to put on a hat. She knew only that the cob had come galloping down the by-road, and the rider might be anywhere—in the rabbit warren, or the spinney, or miles up the road. She dared not hurry, though her heart was racing with an unspoken fear, and she walked steadily along the road, looking on either side of her carefully, Alice following behind panting out exclamations and questions. Once something rustled and Lillias stood still, listening; but she did not see that small wicked figure steal into the undergrowth again and vanish. All that guided her was some instinct that made her push through the low hedge whence the rustling had come, and there, almost at her feet, was a man's helpless body and Colonel Thorne's unconscious face, for he had tried to move into a sitting posture to attract attention, and the pain in his leg had made him faint again.

"Go back to the cottage, Alice, and get help," said Lillias in a level voice and with a perfectly composed manner. "Tell your mother that Colonel Thorne has been thrown, and that I want some brandy—the brandy in the old case bottle in the chiffonier." Even in her extremity Lillias could not help being methodical

and careful in her instructions. "We shall have to get a man to move him."

"Oh, lor, miss, is he killed?" asked Alice hysterically, peering over her mistress's shoulder with an excitement that was almost enjoyment. "He do look bad!"

Lillias turned with a sudden roughness and almost thrust her away. "Go and do as I bid you!" she said harshly, and her face squared itself into a more marked likeness of her cousin John. She looked extremely like John when things had gone very wrong through somebody's carelessness, and his men were feeling the weight of his displeasure. But all that Alice noticed was her authority and the fact that she did not lose her head.

"Miss Lillias was not near so upset as me," she told her mother breathlessly as she related the accident in gasps. "It made me feel all queer like to see him lying there as good as dead, but she just thought about the brandy and getting him home—and it's in the case bottle, she says, in the chiffonier—and a man too, and who are we to get?"

"You run round to the lodge, and see if Mr. Dymock's in, Alice, while I get the brandy; you'd be the better for a drop yourself—you look that done! And they'll want to know at the Place even if Dymock's out, and tell Mrs. Dymock to go up as fast as she can and say the colonel's run away and killed!"

"And 'im so 'andsome!" said Alice admiringly, with her hand on her heart. "Poor gentleman! I fancied 'im looking jest so in his coffin the instant I set eyes on 'im lying there! I couldn't 'ave stayed

with 'im alone as Miss Lillias is, not for all the world! I should jest 'ave screamed. And she so cool and not a tear in her eyes!"

Lillias was indeed dry-eyed as she knelt down beside the helpless figure and put her hand half timidly on his heart; but her lips were almost colourless with an agony that made her far more sick and faint than her hysterical maid. It seemed almost like a liberty to touch him when he was unconscious, and though she had passed her First Aid exams. during the war, like so many cottage girls, she felt singularly helpless—as helpless as that curiously inert figure that seemed no longer Colonel Thorne, since it was stripped of his vitality and dash. And yet his very helplessness made a stronger appeal to Lillias than all the veiled love-making by which he had stolen her heart, and swept away all the barriers of resignation and humility with which she had been entrenching herself in the last twenty-four hours. For the moment at least he was hers, her own, to succour and to save, and her heart's strong yearning might have its way with her, since he was as dependent as a child might be. She belonged to the type of woman who would fain keep its men folk in short clothes for ever.

How handsome he was! even though the ardour was gone from his face and the restless fire from his eyes. "I never thought to like grey hair," thought poor Lillias. "I always said it was a sign of an old man—but *he* isn't old, somehow!"

She flung up her head suddenly, as her quick ears caught the sound of a motor horn—a "Gabriel" horn that rang rather sweetly round a distant curve in

the road. Very few cars came over this little by-way to the more important road, and nobody would use it who did not know it for a short cut.

"It's Dr. Matthews!" said Lillias half aloud in her relief. "Nobody else has a Gabriel horn hereabouts. Oh, thank God! thank God!"

The prayer was as genuine in gratitude as any prayer in church, and she sprang out into the road, waving impetuously to the driver to stop. Dr. Matthews was alone, as he often was, and he drew up sharply on seeing Lillias, bareheaded and gesticulating.

"Oh, doctor, there has been an accident. Sir Henry's friend from the Place has been thrown," she said simply. Lillias was always direct. "I saw the horse galloping home, and came and found Colonel Thorne."

"Is he badly hurt? What's the matter?" asked the doctor as he stopped his engine and tumbled out of the driver's seat. "H'm—very fortunate he's so near the road. Was he conscious when you found him?" He was down on his knees in the fern, making a rapid examination of the inert body as far as he could, even while he spoke.

"No, he has never been conscious," said Lillias. She shivered a little as Dr. Matthews handled the loose limbs, and her breath was rather laboured; but she stood by quietly, ready to serve at whatever task should be set her.

As if to disprove her assertion Ted Thorne at that moment opened his dazed dark eyes and looked up into the doctor's face with his own contracting with pain.

"Don't touch my leg—it's broken," he said huskily.

"I don't think there's any more harm done. Can you get me home?"

"Humph!" grunted the doctor, as much to himself as his patient. "I prefer to be sure of the damage before I jolt you very far over these roads. They're a disgrace to the county! I'm going to trespass on Miss Daish's hospitality to take you to her cottage until I see that you are fit to be moved further. Now, Lillias, my girl, are you strong enough to help me to move a wounded man?"

"Try me, doctor."

"I won't have anything of the sort!" Thorne protested, the colour flushing his drawn face only to fade away again. "If you lend me your arm, doctor, I am sure I can get up."

"All right," said the doctor cheerfully, but there was an ironical smile under his grey moustache. "A compound fracture is not much, of course! Let me put my arm under your shoulders, so—now! Ah! we shall have to trust to you after all, Lillias," he added coolly as Thorne made one effort and with a suppressed oath relapsed again into a swoon.

"How could you let him?" said Lillias reproachfully, with an underlip that trembled.

"Best thing that could happen to him. I'd rather move him while he's unconscious. Now you take him like this—under the armpits—and let me get a lift on him before he struggles. Mind that leg—I don't know if the bone is splintered yet. We shall have to cut the puttee off," he mused aloud as they lifted the dead weight of Thorne's body between them, and carried it to the waiting car. "Lucky it wasn't a boot.

Lillias, your parents never did a better thing than in creating that fine, supple body of yours! You've the strength of a man added to the grace of a woman. Now then, get into the car and take the weight of his head and shoulders again."

She had hardly waited to be told. With the instinct of her desire to serve she aided the doctor as skilfully as any fellow practitioner might have done, and as they drove slowly over the road that lay between them and the cottage Thorne's head rested for the few minutes against her breast as it might never do again, and for one wild moment her lips nearly touched his twitching face—nearly, but not quite.

"I should be no better than a selfish emotional girl like Alice if I did anything so silly—and when he is helpless and at my mercy!" thought Lillias, and her strong young arms held the weight of Thorne's body without any more pressure than the doctor's had done. "He said good-bye to me yesterday—he meant it to be good-bye. I must always remember that, and take no advantage. . . ."

Thorne was in too much pain to realise the situation, and hardly knew who was with him during that short painful drive and the getting him into the cottage and on to the broad old sofa in the familiar sitting-room.

"A lucky thing you have good solid furniture and none of those narrow couches, Lillias," said the doctor, who was familiar with all the cottagers, as well as being the medical adviser at the Place. It was only a swooning pain to Colonel Thorne, with flashes of consciousness during which he saw Dr. Matthews cutting the neatly folded puttee from his leg, and

winced almost before the swollen flesh was touched. He was highly strung as a racehorse, with very sensitive nerves, and though he made no murmur his face contracted under the necessary examination.

"Well?" he said with the impatience of pain, as the doctor raised himself at last and stood looking at him with contemplative eyes.

"It's broken in two places—a compound fracture, that lower one. Never mind, my dear Colonel—the bone isn't sticking out through the flesh as I have seen it before now."

"But how am I to get back to the Place? Can you drive me in your car? I was going to London this afternoon—no chance of that, I suppose?"

The doctor laughed good-humouredly. "Not the least, unless you court disaster. You must lie still and be patient. I am not even going to allow you to go back to the Place. I shall make free with Miss Daish's cottage and turn her drawing-room into an temporary hospital. No use grumbling, Colonel—here you are and here you will stay."

"But it's impossible—I can't put Miss Daish to such inconvenience. You *must* move me!"

"Don't get excited, or you will have a temperature, and then I must send you a night nurse. Otherwise I think Lillias will manage perfectly with her knowledge of First Aid, under me. She's a capital nurse. I'll give her a diploma if you like. Of course if you insist on some young woman in a uniform with more training and less common sense, I can get you one."

"It's impossible!" repeated Colonel Thorne, more to himself than to the doctor. He felt as if faced

with the old Arab saying: "Kismet—it is Destiny!" and for the first time his eyes met Lillias', very grave and blue and without any of the dismay in his own. It seemed as if her beauty were a kind of mask that hid anything she might be feeling. He could see the beauty, but he could not see the woman behind it.

"It is not impossible at all," said the doctor with patient good-humour. "Your man, or Sir Henry's if you haven't brought a servant, can come over every morning and do what you want for you—shave you if you like—as long as he does not interfere with that leg. I'll have nobody but Lillias or myself touch the splint. Come, Colonel Thorne, I think I'm doing you a good turn—most men would thank me for giving them Miss Daish for a nurse. I must say you are not very gallant in your eagerness to get away!"

He laughed roguishly, secure in the fact that Colonel Thorne was many years older than Lillias Daish, and that Lillias had been love-proof until she was regarded as a phenomenon, rather than a young woman, by the neighbourhood. Dr. Matthews was an old fellow himself and allowed to joke, and he had known Lillias from her childhood. Even Colonel Thorne's personal charm and good looks might be discounted in the circumstances.

But Teddy Thorne said to himself again: "Kismet—it is Destiny!" with a sense of being but the sport of Fate. He had for once in his life resisted temptation, he had said good-bye to a woman who attracted him deeply, without even a kiss—almost—and he had really intended to run away from danger. And here was Fate, in the person of a stout provincial doctor,

thrusting him head foremost into the devil's own snare, and smashing all his good intentions with the bludgeon of common sense. There was only one condoning factor in the situation, and that was the perfect composure of Lillias' fair face. She looked concerned for his predicament, sympathetically ready to play the part of nurse assigned to her, equally compliant if he refused the hospitality of her cottage—and nothing more. A sudden sense of extreme pique ousted all Thorne's prudence, aided by the very present pain and exhaustion of his accident.

"Oh, have it your own way!" he said with rare ungraciousness. "If Miss Daish can put up with me of course I'd rather stay where I am. I must have Saunders over here with some things I shall want, anyway. You'll see to that—you *must* see to that, doctor!"

And then that giddy faintness came back, and he was thankful to lie down and be attended to and drink something that Dr. Matthews assured him was a stimulant, but which certainly had a sedative effect upon his nerves, for presently he fell asleep.

When he roused, various things seemed to be happening. The cool parlour had altered to a temporary bedroom, and his servant was laying out his razors and other toilet necessaries on the round table. The window into the garden was open, and he saw a vista of golden-rod and ox-eye daisies with rambling roses between, and on the window-ledge was sitting a great tabby cat, looking at the birds and showing that his mouth watered by the little tremble of his lower jaw.

"I say, don't let that cat come in and jump on my

leg, Saunders ! " said Colonel Thorne, as if it were his own rooms in town, and he had a right to dictate through the whole household.

And Saunders said : " No, sir—nice cat, sir ! very well behaved. Dr. Matthews is come back to help me lift you into bed, sir, if you're ready ? "

The bed had been brought down as if by spirit hands, and stood where the chiffonier had been wont to be. (During part of his sleep Colonel Thorne remembered an impression that he was moving house.) He agreed to the removal, and between Dr. Matthews and his servant he was lifted without the jar he dreaded, and laid in coarse linen that smelt of lavender and set him thinking idly and pleasantly of Daish's fields. Then they brought him some chicken deliciously cooked, and baked custard like cream (a regular invalid's meal !), for it was late in the afternoon and he had had no food, and after that he felt drowsy again, and the bright garden, and the cat, and Saunders all faded away, and left him to fall asleep in fields of lavender.

He did not see Lillias again until the evening. Then she came into the room as naturally as if she had a right and a place in his life, with a lamp in her hands which she set carefully behind him so that he could read the evening paper, and asked him when he would like his evening meal. She was wearing a dark thin gown a little open at the throat, and the braids of her sunny hair shone like new bronze coinage. He had never seen her in dark clothes before. . . . He thought breathlessly how wonderful she would be in a black evening gown with her neck and arms bare, and forgot to answer her.

"Colonel Thorne!" she said with a startled confusion. She did not know if he were ill again, or vexed, or silent from some intention she could not fathom. Was he really angry because he was a prisoner here? Ought she to have resisted the overmastering desire to keep him, and have aided and abetted when he wanted to risk being taken back to the Place? Oh, why had she been so selfish, and so blind to his real reluctance to stay? . . .

In the midst of her humiliation she saw that he was holding out his hand to her.

"Lillias, will you ever forgive me?" he said.

She stood by his side, looking at him in her silent loveliness, with the guard of her pride upon her.

"I do not understand," she said.

"For staying here—when I ought to have gone. I know I ought—but you said you would nurse me, and I wanted to stay. I have upset your whole house, and you will get bored sick with me—won't you?" She shook her head and the blue eyes lightened, but she did not smile. "Lillias, will you really nurse me?"

"I will do my best," said the girl, almost coldly in the effort she made not to take advantage of him. He did not mean anything really, she knew. The wooing voice and the dark eyes looking up at her—so dark with the recent pain!—would have been the same for any woman. But the temptation was on her to kneel down by him and tell him in a whisper that seemed to come by instinct that he was her darling and the only man who had ever made her feel as she did now, and to beg and pray that she might at least serve him

while a blessed fate had given his life into her hands. Instead of which she stood by his side looking placidly beautiful and asked him if he could eat a little fish, and drink some of the champagne that Sir Henry had sent over. Dr. Matthews said he was to have a light diet. It did not seem worth while to cook more than he would eat, or to open the wine if he would not have it. Lillias was always practical.

.

It had been a fair day, this one that had altered Colonel Thorne's plans with fateful results, and other destinies as well. The harvest at Leith was nearly all in, and the men sang in rough chorus as they brought in the last waggon loads. It was, however, not one of the regular old harvest-home songs, or some local ditty that would have pleased a student of folk-lore. Leith was too near to London to remain unsophisticated, despite the unusual type of its master. What the men sang was one of the latest favourites from the music-halls, or, as they prefer to style themselves now, the variety stages, and the inappropriateness of the words mattered nothing to them because of the lilt of the ragtime:

"I know—I know—I know a bit of life about the dear old Cit—
Comin' and goin',—
You bet I'm IT!
And what I *don't* know isn't worth knowin'."

The boy Charley lifted his head with a sudden contraction of his facial muscles that was almost a grimace. If a clown writhed in pain he might look so in the midst of his merriment, and indeed it stopped

the faint smile on the small nervous lips and seemed to jar on his ear, for he did not attempt to join in the chorus, though he was sitting on the side of the waggon between Bill Somers and old David Adam, and both of them were adding to the somewhat eccentric harmony. Charley had been unusually quiet all the afternoon, for his sharp tongue was generally at work if his hands were idle. But to-day he had employed his hands rather than his tongue, and had done his best to take his share of the labour, scaring birds from the corn, or standing patiently at the heads of his friends the horses when he could do nothing else.

"Join in, mate!" said Somers good-naturedly, nudging the boy with his elbow.

"'Comin' and goin'—
You bet I'm IT!—
And what I *don't* know isn't worth knowin'!"

Can't yer sing?"

"I don't know the bloomin' 'ymn," said Charley curtly, turning his little sunburnt face from the man and almost shivering. It seemed an odd confession for a London arab who had all his wits about him in the streets, for the song had been whistled and sung and bandied from mouth to mouth until it was as familiar as the National Anthem.

"Let him be—he's tired," said old David with unusual gentleness. "He've done a fair day's work for onc't, and the heat sweats it out of us men, let alone the lads." He stretched his lean figure with the conceit of his prime, for he hated to acknowledge himself less vigorous than younger men; but Bill forbore to laugh, though his lips broadened in a smile as he took up the burden of the song again—Carlotta Edisons,

song, that had caused the Palace Theatre to shake with applause many and many a time!

"I know—I know—I know a bit of life about the dear old Cit—
Comin' and goin',—
You bet I'm IT!—
And what I *don't* know isn't worth knowin'!"

John Daish left the reaped fields with the last of the labourers, and throwing his leg over the farm pony, rode home in the early evening, for the last days of August were drawing in. He was glad that the harvest was gathered before the fine weather broke, and that the men seemed satisfied—an important point to the farmer of to-day, both as to wages and to entertainment. They had worked overtime to carry the corn, and had not grumbled. There would be a substantial harvest-home for them to-night in the lower end of the large granary, where the tables had been set and spread by Mrs. Skelton and the farm girls. The housekeeper's work at harvest time was by no means the lightest at Leith, for she had to prepare and cook for fifty people at least.

Daish had not seen Charley all day save at a distance, doing odd jobs for the men and apparently happy and engaged. He supposed the boy was enjoying the new experience of harvesting, and did not take more notice of him for reasons of policy. There had been talk enough and some jealousy of his harbouring the waif and then giving him his protection, always fostered and kept alive by Mrs. Skelton's animosity. She was a woman with a tongue like a file; and it was natural that the men, some of whom had sons of their

own, should resent an outsider getting a berth on the farm rather than their own boys. John Daish would have liked to speak with his "Lavender lad" and to be amused with his comments on the harvesting, but he resisted the impulse and went back to the house to wash and change his working clothes before he took the head of the long table in the distillery. He always dined with the hands at harvest-home, and fifty men, women, and boys sat down with him.

As he crossed the road from the house to the great barn he paused a moment and looked back across his land with a sense of rest and peace that he remembered wistfully long after. A pale gilt moon hung in the arc of heaven, and the velvet hills were folded quietly to sleep. From the granary came the clatter of knives and forks already, and the sound of laughter and jests that would hush themselves a little, so soon as he entered. Daish lingered a moment, looking at the deserted stackyard, the dusky buildings of the stables and cowhouses, and the idle farm implements. He wondered for the fifth time where Charley was.

Then a hand touched his arm timidly, and he turned and looked down into the boy's face. Perhaps it was the mingling of moonlight and dusk that made it look so tense and colourless, and the eyes so tragic.

"I want to ask you something, guv'nor."

"Well, laddie?"

"You're always at me to learn something besides the farming—you want me to study?"

"Yes, I do," said Daish honestly. "I think you have something in that head of yours that's different to most farm-boys, Charley."

"I'll learn if you'll teach me—I won't go to school."

Wilful and wayward as ever, Charley was yet making a concession to his master's wish. Hitherto he had refused to read anything but the picture papers, and had threatened to run away again if Daish pressed the question of sending him to some place of technical instruction. The farmer caught at the chance of this conciliatory mood.

"I can teach you in the evenings, enough to find out what your real bent is," he said with suppressed eagerness, oblivious of the fact that he was giving up such little leisure as he had himself. "But you'll have to study even if you feel sleepy. How will you stand the later hours?"

A curious smile widened the boy's lips without rising to the tragedy of his eyes. "I can stand late hours," he said quietly.

"Then will you come into the house after dark, when the men have gone to their own cottages? I'll let you into the parlour by the window. There's no need to let Mrs. Skelton know." The big handsome man looked almost ashamed of himself, and as if he were doing something wrong in his own house by giving an hour or so to teaching the sharp-witted boy who had won his interest. But a quick look of pleasure or relief dawned in Charley's face for the first time.

"Right-o!" he said. "I'll get in, no fear. Look for me to-night, and the old Skeleton shan't catch me What time does she turn in?"

"About half-past nine; she may be later to-night because of the harvest."

Charley nodded, and slipped into the distillery like a little shadow just as one of the men came to the door

to look out and see if the master were coming, for the table was tired of waiting. John Daish went in to his last duty with an odd sense of pleasure to come in his heart, that made him a yet more genial host to his men than usual. And yet it was strange that he should so look forward to the stolen hours with his "Lavender lad," the secret understanding between them, the quiet study together while the old house grew still and Mrs. Skelton and the maids slept. He did not ask himself what the attraction was—he never dreamed of anything but a new and absorbing interest in the unusual character of the boy, half gipsy and half genius, who was beginning to respond to him like some wild creature that is growing tame.

Some hours later he came back to the house, went into the parlour and shut the door, ostensibly for a last pipe before he went to bed. The kitchen was dark, and he could hear Mrs. Skelton moving about overhead already. The window stood open, and he went towards it as if drawn by some unseen power, and peered out into the garden, smelling the faint sweetness of tobacco plants and night-flowering stocks. He leaned into the dewy darkness, wondering if Charley were already there, and his heart sank with disappointment as he remembered the boy's impish caprice and that it was much more likely he had fallen asleep in the loft over the stables, tired out with his long day.

Then he heard the gurgle of a low laugh behind him, and turning saw something creep out from the low deep recess beside the empty fireplace.

"Charley?" he said breathlessly.

"Guv'nor!" said the boy.

CHAPTER XI

THE DROWNING LADY

MRS. SKELTON was a strong-willed, strong-minded woman in her daily walk of life ; but like most people with little education or experience she was intensely superstitious, and her weak spot was her fear of the supernatural. Leith farmhouse was not haunted, but there was an uncomfortable story attached to the property in the tradition of a young girl having drowned herself in the very bathing-pool where Charley was so fond of playing truant. The figure of the girl was supposed to haunt the dusk, rush down to the water and throw herself in, her arms above her head and her ghastly face fully visible in an unearthly aura of light that surrounded her.

Mrs. Skelton would not have passed the bathing-pool after sunset for any consideration whatever, and when she went to her friends, the lodge-keepers at the Place, she was obliged to walk a mile out of her way going home, to avoid the little stream that meandered from Sir Henry's home park down to the farm, crossing the road just at the turning to Lillias' cottage. She was superstitious about seeing the new moon through glass also, and hearing the robins " weep " in winter, and bringing whitethorn into the house, and driving away a black cat.

It was through the last stray cat to come to Leith that the boy Charley unfortunately got to know of her vulnerable spot, and to plot a revenge upon her for many a small unkindness and slight as well as her open hostility. There was little of the Christian in John Daish's foundling at present, and he by no means turned the other cheek for blows. Rather he preferred the Old Testament adage of an eye for an eye, and acted on it.

He found his friend Hector one day growling at a skinny framework of a cat who was spitting at him with every hair erect, and balancing herself upon the kitchen window-sill. Hector's attitude becoming too menacing, the cat jumped into the kitchen, and Charley followed through the door with the really good-natured desire to save the stray from being hunted out with a broom, as he fully expected. He was not himself welcome in the kitchen, and he grabbed at the cat and was going to beat a retreat with it when Mrs. Skelton's voice stopped him.

"Here, you boy, what are you doing to the cat? Whose is it?"

"Dunno," said Charley, pausing in his flight. "Hector nearly got her—she's a stray."

"Did she come in of herself?"

"Yes—jumped through the window. I didn't 'elp 'er," said Charley, thinking that it was his agency that was suspected.

"Then you leave her alone," said the housekeeper unexpectedly. "I'll not have a black cat turned out of this house, but you can get out yourself. What are you doing loafing about when the pigs need feeding? Off you go, or I'll make you."

She had filled a saucer with milk during her rapid speech and placed it on the speckless floor for the cat, who drank thirstily, splashing over the saucer in her eagerness but meeting with no rebuff. Charley went, with a grimace, but he had learned something through his ill-appreciated effort on the cat's behalf, and his quick brain was already deducing the probability of Mrs. Skelton's belief in "luck" from her instant adoption of the black cat.

"If she's afraid to turn out a cat 'cos it's black she's afraid of other things," thought the boy with wicked joy. "I'll break her looking-glass for her to give her seven years' misery, and trim her bonnet with peacock's feathers, the old scarecrow! My! what a joy ride. Why didn't I think of it before?"

These unamiable intentions underwent various changes for the discomfiture of Mrs. Skelton, but could not devise anything that quite satisfied a desire for revenge. It was Bill Somers' missus who warned Charley of the ghost story, which came as an unconscious revelation.

"If you go bathing so late you'll see the Drowning Lady!" she threatened, with intent to give the farm-boy a fright. "You'll never forget it all your days if you do."

"'O's 'er?" asked Charley coolly, sticking impudent thumbs into the pockets of poor Leslie's knickerbockers.

"A girl what drowned herself in your pool, through being no better than she ought," said Mrs. Somers virtuously. "You'll see her some day sudden, just as it's getting dusk, and she throws up her arms and screams—awful!"

Charley's black eyes opened wide with unholy interest and a dawning idea. "What she look like?"

"Like a drowned woman already, they say, with a face as white as chalk and long red 'air." Mrs. Somers wished to make the ghost as horrible as might be, but Charley's shameless interest did not betoken fear. "If she once ketches you she'll drag you under!" she said, embroidering the tale for her own benefit. "You'd better not go bathing evenings, and coming home late."

"So as Bill don't litter down for me, and comes in to supper earlier," said Charley sarcastically. He never had bathed in the evenings, but he was fond of loitering down by the pool and climbing, monkey fashion, into the forked branches of an old beech. "Well, if I meet the young woman with the carrots on 'er 'ead, perhaps we'll go diving together. 'Good-evening,' I'll say. 'Give us a lead, miss.' 'Lor,' sez she, 'it's so long since I 'ad a young man to talk to I've almost forgot 'ow!'"

"She'll say something worse than that to yer, once she ketches yer!" said Bill's missus warningly, much chagrined that her ghost story had failed to scare her hearer away from the pond as she intended. For Bill had often been beguiled into "doing a bit for the lad" when Charley shirked work, to save his getting into trouble, and was in consequence late for his supper, as the boy knew. Mrs. Somers shot her last bolt at a venture, falling back upon the housekeeper's dreaded personality to champion a lost cause.

"Even Mrs. Skelton's scared of the Drowning Lady—she's sure she'll see her some day!"

The evil star of Carlotta Edison was in the ascendant.

Charley was thoughtful for some days, and paid more than one surreptitious visit to the village with his master's bicycle, though he did not go to the post-office this time. He was not given to seeking the housekeeper of his own free will, and Mrs. Skelton was the more surprised when he knocked politely on the kitchen door one day with a message from Sir Henry's lodge-keeper's wife.

"Mrs. Paignton stopped me as I was coming back from bathing this morning, and said she'd be glad to see you any time you was over that way," he said in an unusually subdued manner. "She's got a brood o' young turkeys, and afraid she can't rear 'em."

"I'll go over this evening—I've not much to do after tea," said Mrs. Skelton promptly. She was always ready to do a neighbour a turn, particularly when it asserted her own superior knowledge. "I could have told her July broods were no good—nothing later than May. And they're sure to droop soon as they get their combs."

"I dunno. That was the message," said Charley with well-assumed indifference, and slouched off to the fields, where he was so unusually industrious in scaring birds all the afternoon that Daish himself gave him leave of absence to go down to the pool if he wanted to.

"It's hot weather, laddie, and you've been at it all the time," he said with that gentler note in his voice that it often took now that he had become Charley's tutor. "Don't be late to-night," he added guardedly. "You are losing your sleep, and you want

it at your age. The sooner we get to work the sooner I can let you go."

"It don't hurt me, guv'nor," Charley assured him, but there was something furtive in his own manner, almost as if he were ashamed. "I'll be in at nine, soon as it's dark. I've had a go at them sums, chalked up on the stable door."

"Well done!" said Daish, laughing, for arithmetic was not Charley's forte. He was far quicker at the elementary Latin that Daish was teaching him, with apologies to his own good sense. What could a farm boy do with Latin—or for that matter with the rudiments of science that the farmer-scholar was instilling into the eager mind? But he dreamed of other careers for his "Lavender lad" to that of the farm labourer. One of the bribes he had offered, in order to get the boy to work, was the water-colour drawing of the lavender that Charley had so much liked. It was a personal sacrifice, for Daish appreciated and valued the little sketch above all the others in his possession, and it marks the stage which his absorption in his protégé had reached that he should have even offered it. He was aware too that everyone he knew would have condemned him as insane or infatuated to give a valuable drawing to the waif of the London streets who owned no more than the clothes which had been bestowed on him in charity. And yet he had promised it as a prize should Charley pass a certain standard of his master's setting, and consent to further tuition later on. The boy's face had flushed and then paled at the suggestion.

"D'you mean that you'll give me the lavender

picture for my own ?" he demanded, with a veritable hunger in his black eyes.

"Yes, when you've satisfied me that you are worth the teaching, Charley. But it will be hard work—and you'll have to go to school some day."

The desire faded out of the curious, vivid face, and the old stubbornness came back.

"I shall never do that," he said—obstinately, to John Daish's mind, which had no clue to the impossibility. "I'll learn with you so long as you'll teach me—but I'd die shut up in a school with a lot of classes and rules. I'll have to give up the lavender picture."

He glanced with eyes that were almost moist at the wonderful little sketch of his desire, for the conversation took place one night in the parlour during the lesson hour. Daish laid his broad hand on the round head—the black hair felt like a mat for thickness—and his smile made his handsome face beautiful.

"Wouldn't you try it to please me, laddie ?" he said, and wondered at the desperate, despairing glance of Charley's eyes.

"I'd do almost anything to please you, guv'nor," he answered with dangerous meaning. "Only—don't send me away !"

John was more moved than he thought it wise to show—strangely moved, and with a heart that seemed full of protective tenderness.

"We won't part, Charley," he promised blindly. "But you shall win the lavender picture yet."

But the boy shook his head with prophetic sadness. "I shall never do anything to deserve it—I'll never

have a right to it," he said. "But I've got it here." —he touched his forehead. "And I can see it if I shut my eyes. You can't take *that* from me!"

.

Mrs. Skelton started for the lodge at the Place later than she had intended, or else the kitchen clock was slow for once. She relied implicitly on the kitchen clock, which she always wound and set herself, and she did not dream that the most incorrigible of farm-boys would dare to tamper with it while she was skimming cream in the dairy. She found that Charley's story of the young brood of turkeys was true in fact, and that Mrs. Paignton had said that she should be thankful for Mrs. Skelton's advice. Only, the boy had not met the lodge-keeper's wife by the pool at all, or been stopped by her. He had been loafing about the lodge and asked for a bit of bread and butter, as he had not had his breakfast and was hungry. Then he had got asking questions about the chicks, and it was rather by his suggestion than hers that Mrs. Paignton had applied to Mrs. Skelton for advice.

"That boy has got a liar's mouth! He can't speak straight all through, whatever he says," said the housekeeper, by no means mollified that Mrs. Paignton assured her that Charley had said it was his firm belief that "Mrs. Skelton knew more about the 'ole bloomin' farm than any man on it!"

Having condemned the place where the chicks were at run as too damp, and warned Mrs. Paignton that they would never stand cold, Mrs. Skelton started for home again, a good hour later than she had intended. It was growing dusk, and she had to pass the haunted

pool! But if she went round by the road, as she usually did, she would be late with John Daish's supper, and to do her justice she was not a woman to allow her fears to come before her duty. She walked fast to race the coming night, and her face was a little whiter than its usual brick-red as she neared the great trees that overhung the cool, deep water.

It was twilight in the fields by now, but it was really dark under the trees. Mrs. Skelton felt her heart thump and her hands tremble as she neared the place of the tragedy, and kept her eyes steadily away from the pool. In consequence she saw nothing until her ears were assailed by a splash and a shriek, and she whirled round against her will to face the horror behind her. Neither the splash nor the shriek had been at all ghostly, and had she not been almost delirious with fright, Mrs. Skelton would have realised that a light but very real body had just dived into the water with a stage scream that would have done credit to a Surrey-side melodrama, to emerge dripping and hastily wrap itself in an old dust-sheet and arrange an extemporary wig of flowing red wool! But she was too terrified to reason, and with a shriek far more real than the ghost's she started to run in the direction of the nearest dwelling-house—a little two-roomed cottage about a hundred yards off—with the ghost in hot pursuit, flapping its drapery and uttering sounds that were half choked with impish laughter.

The pursuit ended at the cottage door. Mrs. Skelton, her face leaden with her terror, fell rather than walked into the little kitchen where an old woman was boiling her frugal supper of potatoes. She was the

poorest of the poor, and lived by such scanty jobs as even her cottage neighbours could give her, her old-age pension, and firing gathered from the hedgerows. But Mrs. Skelton had sometimes given her waste food that was not good for the fowls, and from the lofty position of Leith kitchen had played the patron. The old crone was nearly as frightened as the housekeeper on seeing her fall into the room, and with some reason, for Mrs. Skelton could neither breathe nor speak. She lay cowering against the floor, her face that unnatural colour, and then suddenly lifting her eyes uttered another of those dreadful cries, for the Thing of her dread had appeared at the window and was capering with derision at her plight.

The old woman who owned the cottage, however, was less sensible of ghosts than Mrs. Skelton, or perhaps her bleared eyes served her better after all. She hobbled over to the window and perceived the ludicrous apparition at close range—the chalked face, the red-wool hair, the dragging sheet. It was more like the bogey made out of a turnip-head than the unfortunate of the pool. Charley was, indeed, beginning to be a little frightened over Mrs. Skelton's state, though he rejoiced over his revenge, and did not disappear quite so quickly as he might have done when the owner of the cottage looked through the window. He vanished after a minute, and made tracks for the pool where he had left his clothes, but he had betrayed himself in spite of the disguise.

"Don't 'ee take on so now, Mrs. Skelton, ma'am!" mumbled the old woman, hobbling back to that prostrate figure on the floor. "Ye've had a fright and

don't know what ye do. Come and sit in the cushion chair, and I'll warm 'ee up some tea."

She led her trembling guest to the fire, and seated her with her back to the window, but Mrs. Skelton still clung to her with desperate hands.

"Is it gone?" she asked, and the words rattled in her throat. "I knew I should see her some day—the drowning girl of the pool!"

The old crone broke into a wheezing laugh that half choked her. "Why, 'twas nothing but that dratted boy dressed up!" she said. "He be a young devil! 'Tis the same I saw give the poor gentleman a fall when I be gathering sticks in the spinney. He's not right, for sure, and should be kept to home. Rushing out on the horse just as 'e must 'a rushed out on you to-night, ma'am!"

The tea was reviving Mrs. Skelton, but it did not entirely account for the sudden access of colour in her face. She sat up, and her eyes narrowed with anger and excitement.

"That boy, you say, playing a trick on me—on *me?* And the same thing in the spinney when the Colonel's horse took fright and bolted? Tell me again, Marty—did you see it? Why have you never told?"

Marty began to be frightened in her turn, and to wish she had not betrayed her own confidence. "I was just a-gathering sticks—and Sir 'Enry 'e allus allows us do that! I saw the poor gentleman fall, and I thought he was dead. Don't tell on it, Mrs. Skelton, ma'am, or mebbe I'll have trouble. It was that I was afeared of at the time, and the inquest and all, and me asked so many questions!"

"Colonel Thorne isn't dead," said Mrs. Skelton, restraining her eagerness, "and you won't get into any trouble, Marty; I'll see to that. Tell me again. You are sure it was the boy—the one that the master took on at Leith?"

"Certain sure," said Marty, foreseeing many more odd scraps from the kitchen, poor soul, for her information. "A long stick in his hand, he had, and rushed out at the horse to frighten him a-purpose. He made off quick when the gentleman fell. 'Tis sheer wickedness in him, to frighten folks like as he did you to-night. And I was frightened too, seeing the gentleman lie so still. But miss from the cottage comes along with widow Smith's daughter, and then the doctor's motor-car, and they took him away and so I never said nothin'."

Mrs. Skelton's smouldering anger against Charley was in a blaze. She had been made to look almost ridiculous in the eyes of this old crone whom she had patronised, and for all she knew others might have seen her flying in the dusk with that burlesque spectre in pursuit—a silly spectacle! She was not popular in the neighbourhood, but none of the cottagers' children would have ventured to make a guy of her as Charley had successfully done. It was a stupid, childish trick, a little vulgar and certainly ill-natured, but not the criminal offence into which Mrs. Skelton's passion magnified it. Marty's recognition of the boy and her betrayal of his part in Thorne's accident put a weapon into Mrs. Skelton's hands that she meant to use with full effect without acknowledging her own humiliation.

She walked home somewhat stiffly and slowly, for

she was an elderly woman, and a shock such as she had had was not good for her. The reaped fields on either side the road were grey with peace, and the silence of the evening like a thought of God; but her grim face was by no means shaken from its purpose as she laid John Daish's supper. She was waiting for him to come in to make her loud accusations, and she gloried in it, though she knew that she was going to harass and even distress him. A jealous love is more merciless to its object than even a selfish one, for it is more blind. Mrs. Skelton would have sacrificed herself to the death for her master, and have worked herself to the bone; but when it came to the test of another to whom he showed preference, then she sacrificed him.

He was coming now; she heard his cheery whistle in the porch, for he went happily of late, and Hector's whine of greeting. She turned to meet the beauty of his smiling face with hate in her eyes, though not for him, and no more hesitated to strike than if, being of intention a murderess, she had seized one of the shining knives on the table and plunged it into his heart.

CHAPTER XII

THE CRACK OF DOOM

COLONEL THORNE never could look back on the weeks that followed his accident without a confused sense of rapture and discomfort. Both were due to Lillias, for if his racing pulses made everything but her presence a secondary consideration, he felt that he was at a very great disadvantage before her, and it galled him as it would not have done a younger man. Teddy Thorne was very apt to judge by externals, and he trusted to his smartness and gay good-humour to win him favour from women now that his youth was past—an error of judgment, since it was the personality of the man to which he owed his success, and it was a more potent factor with every year of his life. But he was not astute enough to recognise this, and in consequence he fretted himself a good deal during his convalescence. How could a fellow be smart lying in bed in an improvised bedroom, with his hair ruffled as well as his temper, and an old cricket blazer over his silk pyjamas? True, he insisted on shaving every day, but his fool of a man always placed the looking-glass so that he could not see to brush his hair every hour or so as vanity prompted. And his usual good spirits had deserted him under stress of circumstances.

"I was a fool to think whether I would go out of her life in time!" he told himself bitterly. "She would not care now whether I went or stayed. This will disillusion her for ever, and it only makes me more infatuated with her every day that she acts as my nurse."

Lillias treated him with a kind of firm indulgence, as a sick child who must be humoured for the time being. She was invariably kind but equally decided when it was a question of the doctor's orders. And she seemed to grow a little graver day by day which he put down to boredom from the sick-nursing and the disorder and upset in her home. He could not tell that she was neither bored nor disillusioned, and that as the days passed she was asking herself with blank dismay what she was to do to fill her life when it was all over—when he was gone? He had never shown temper or dissatisfaction; he had always been most humbly grateful for all she had done for him. He must have a very sweet disposition, she ruminated, as well as the quick attractive personality that had taken her slower senses captive. Lillias had nursed her father when he had the gout, and was philosophically of opinion that all men shouted at their womenkind when they were ill, and would hurl things about the room when the mood took them. She supposed they could not help it. Her mother had taught her that they must be humoured, not argued with, and that women were different—their virtue was endurance. She applied this doctrine to Colonel Thorne, adapted herself and her household to his needs almost before he knew them, and showed a patience and unflagging devotion that was part of her traditions. Naturally,

he thought her an angel in mind as well as face, and, being a gentleman, he did not swear or fling the pillows through the open window where the cat sat on the outside ledge for a target—as she had quite expected. Naturally, also, she was inclined to idealise in her turn. It was very unfortunate for both of them.

The problem that troubled her most was how to keep him amused with the small resources she possessed, and not allow him to grow restless and insist on moving before the leg was safe. Dr. Matthews had impressed this upon her, and her own heart unconsciously impressed it more. He must not go away at present—Dr. Matthews had said so, and if there were a twinkle in his eye Lillias was too single-minded to see it. She told Thorne about her bees, which were not only bees but personalities to her, but she was not deluded by any sentimentality even over the marvellous work of the hives.

"Bees are said to reason," she said in her dispassionate fashion, "but their judgment is often misled by situation, so I don't think it is true. The first swarm will always go back to the place of the old brood-chamber, and though they find it 'swept and garnished,' as the Bible says, it does not make them suspicious. They set to, queen and all, to repopulate the new chamber, while all the while I have only put the old one at the back of the hive! And there's another thing that makes me think them rather stupid—the bees who are out gathering honey at the time will return to the old place and the new brood-chamber, until those at home in the old one come to the conclusion that honey time is over, rear their new queen,

and stay at home contentedly to raise a new colony for me."

Then she would pause and flush, afraid that she was boring him. The only thing that embarrassed Lillias was when she had to talk much instead of listening. But she was so mortally afraid of his getting restive over his convalescence that she was ready to do anything that should amuse or distract him. Thorne himself solved the difficulty one evening when she brought him the evening paper that was always sent over from the Place.

"I think I shall have to teach you to play whiskey poker," he said. "Are you shocked?"

"I am very fond of cards," said Lillias seriously, and quite unconscious of the unexpectedness of her remark. "When father was alive we used to play whist, if we could get a neighbour to come in. I missed it very much after his death. Mother didn't care for it much. She never liked to play anything really but Old Maid."

Her beautiful mouth widened into an irresistible smile that would have made a monk ready to gamble with her, and she gave that gurgling laugh again. Colonel Thorne watched her with eyes that he vainly hoped were entirely impersonal in their appreciation.

"I can't think of a more inappropriate game for you to play!" he said.

But Lillias made no answer. She had a way of dropping all allusions to marriage or male attentions into the deep well of her silence, the waters of which were too unfathomable even for a splash of protest. As a matter of fact she had nothing to say, and so she

said nothing; but the very simplicity of her reason foiled Ted Thorne as no other woman had ever foiled him. He sat propped up on his pillows, trying to read her unbetraying face while she fetched a pack of cards and sat down to her lesson.

At the end of the evening he was obliged to confess that her statement was no boast—she was very fond of cards, and she could follow their quaint combinations and master the design of a game with the ease of an expert. Whiskey poker was abandoned for écarté, and écarté for piquet. Then Thorne began to be proud of his pupil, and he taught her bridge as far as it can be taught between two players. The habit of whist helped her, but she had grasped the game in two lessons, and as they played night after night he began to see that with practice she would be not only his equal but his superior. And he was one of the best players in his club!

"You haven't made a fault," he said at last, looking at her with a little flush of pleasure in his surprise. "You played that hand better than I should have done. I begin to think your talents are wasted—instead of keeping bees and chickens you ought to be in a bridge set, in town."

"Perhaps I should not do so well playing with four—it must be very difficult," said Lillias without elation.

"Not a bit—except that you would find that your partner was a fool compared to yourself! But we ought to get your cousin to come over one evening and play cut-throat—three-handed auction."

"I don't think he would come in the evenings," said Lillias, and a slightly puzzled look crept into the

large, finely-coloured eyes, that was not quite trouble. "I do not know what John is doing in his evenings now, but he will not come out, though he used to be fond of a walk before he went to bed. I think he must be studying again, and it is not good for him after his work is done."

Thorne did not answer, but the puzzled look in her eyes was reflected in his, and now it was very much more like trouble. The lavender farmer had been in to see him several times—always in the daytime, now he thought of it—and had been heartily sympathetic about the accident and most simply pleased that his cousin should put her household at the service of the gentleman from the Place, Sir Henry's friend, a man he had himself found a pleasant companion and a good sportsman. There was not the least hesitation on John's part in offering Colonel Thorne the hospitality of the cottage, any more than there had been on Lillias'. There was a certain dignity about the Daish attitude of mind in that they never had a suspicious or ugly thought unless it were proved to them, and then they were—perhaps for this very reason—more righteously angry than more cynical folk, because the very generosity of this confidence had been outraged, as Cousin Sarah Anne Jennings had discovered. No reference had ever been made to the cause of the accident beyond Colonel Thorne's brief statement that the cob had shied badly and he was riding carelessly. But sometimes his heart sank when he thought of John's eyes being opened to the truth—if they ever were. What was Carlotta doing all this while? Had she been wise in time and left Leith as he suggested?

Only once did he hear her referred to, and that was when Lillias asked after the boy Charley with an indulgent smile.

"I hope Charley is going on all right, John," she said, "and pleasing you."

"Yes, I think he is doing very well," said the farmer, and his deeply blue eyes cleared as if with an inner light. "He has taken to study at last."

"I am glad the clothes fitted. He looks less of a little vagabond."

"It was very kind of you, Lillias."

Colonel Thorne looked out of the window at the tabby cat, who was crouched there in a kind of disdain of Hector lying at the garden gate. Beyond the cat's great brindled head a cluster of nasturtiums climbed over the wooden fence and made a running flame of colour against the dark trees beyond. They were blooming so freely that there seemed more flowers than leaves. Lillias had once told him that they reminded her of marmalade, and he smiled mechanically now at the literal simile—for the liquid orange and yellow was really very much like the preserve—though for the moment he did not really take in Tommy's watchful attitude, or the flowers. He was thinking of Charley, and himself, and Lillias and John, and the disguised girl's passionate denunciation of him as well as herself in coming into these people's quiet lives to derange and embitter them. . . .

John left soon afterwards without another reference to Charley, nor did he come very often, though he sent up every luxury that Leith afforded, for the invalid—butter and cream, and peaches ripened on a south wall,

and late peas. It seemed almost as if his gifts were meant to excuse his presence.

But one evening, when the solo bridge was absorbing both patient and nurse, there was a sudden stir of someone approaching the cottage, the sound of Mrs. Smith going slowly down the passage, and then her knock upon the parlour door.

"It's Mr. Daish, miss—he wants to know if the Colonel is well enough for a visitor?"

"Are you?" said Lillias with deference. She would not admit even her cousin without Thorne's leave. He had been promoted to the substantial sofa for the last day or so, that had won Dr. Matthews' approbation for its solid strength, Saunders and the doctor lifting him on and off between them, or sometimes the servant doing so alone. In a short time Colonel Thorne hoped to be allowed to hobble with a crutch.

"Of course—delighted to see him," he said cordially. "We must just finish this game, but he won't mind waiting?"

"Oh no."

John Daish came in rather silently and sat down in the shadows beyond the lamp while the hand was played out. Thorne did not see his face until he advanced into the circle of the lamp, and then he was instantly aware that there was something wrong. Between the man's fine blue eyes there was a deep line as if it had been suddenly graven there, and his lips had an ugly set that aged and hardened his face. Thorne's heart gave a throb of dismay, and a horrible premonition seized him that this was the beginning of Charley's tragedy.

"Well, Daish," he said cheerfully. "Your cousin's duties are never done, you see—she has to amuse me when she is not otherwise sick-nursing."

"I'm very glad she can, sir," said John without hesitation. And then he came direct to the point that was evidently in his mind. "I'm very troubled, Colonel Thorne—I've heard something I don't like about your accident."

Lillias was putting the cards together quietly, and fitting them into an old-fashioned case embroidered with fine beads that had held many packs of cards since her grandmother made it. She paused and looked at John with surprise, her manner quite collected, but evidently pondering whether she ought to go away and leave the two men together.

Colonel Thorne said nothing, but he made a slight motion towards her of dissent, and she sat down again and took some work from a side table.

"Would you tell me how your accident took place?" said John Daish, and his compressed lips twitched a little as if with pain.

"Why, the cob shied badly and I took a toss. I was riding carelessly—it was my own fault. But I think they've been corning him too much, and he was short of work."

"What did he shy at? Excuse me, Colonel, I know Sir Henry's cob well. I've ridden him. He's as honest as the day. It would be a big thing that would make him forget his manners."

"I suppose he saw something in the bushes," said Colonel Thorne reluctantly. "But as I tell you, I think he was a bit above himself."

"There was an old woman gathering firewood in the spinney, who perhaps you didn't see," said John slowly, as if the words were as difficult to him as some foreign language. "She confesses that she saw the accident, but was too frightened to go and help. These people are all fools when they ought to keep their heads. Then Lillias and the girl arrived on the scene, and the woman made off home, glad to be out of it."

"Why did she hold her tongue till now?" said Thorne sharply.

"Because she thought you were killed. She didn't want to be asked questions. When she heard you were getting better she began to talk."

"She had better have held her tongue at this late hour. It doesn't go to her credit that she left me there without finding out if I were alive or dead. But probably the whole story is a lie. These old women love to make out that they have been on the spot, for the sake of a gossip."

"I don't think she was lying—I wish I did," said Daish with a bitterness that seemed unwarrantable. "There is something more. She says that she saw my boy Charley with a long pole creeping slowly through the spinney, and that he rushed out and deliberately startled the horse. The story has gone all round the place"—he muttered an oath—"and it reached me through my housekeeper."

Colonel Thorne drew a breath of relief. If this was all, the fat was not yet in the fire. So long as Daish said "My *boy* Charley" he did not know the truth. Colonel Thorne's keen eyes read his discomfited face

with characteristic observation, and decided that point at once. He was annoyed, hurt, depressed for some reason—but he did not know the truth.

"Well, Daish," he said lightly, "I'm sorry that there has been so much talk, but it certainly doesn't reflect on you. As a matter of fact I did see the boy, but I was not going to mention it because I didn't want him to get into trouble. You know what boys are, fooling about after rabbits or birds, and no doubt the young rascal was frightened enough at what he'd done and made off pretty quick. Call it an accident and warn him that the police might have charged him. He won't do it again!"

"That's just what I'm afraid he *might*, if he doesn't get a sharp lesson," said John in obvious distress. "You don't know my boy—he seems possessed of a devil sometimes! It's just as if the life in him went to his head like drink and made him do things that—that he mustn't do. As like as not he meant to startle the cob and cause an accident if the mood were on him."

Then Lillias spoke for the first time. Her face had gone red and white, and a kind of horror came into it at her cousin's earnestness; but her heart did not entirely govern her head even when it was deeply implicated, and she kept her judgment.

"Mrs. Skelton is very prejudiced against Charley," she said. "You must remember that, John. She would make the case as bad against him as she could."

Thorne gave her one quick grateful glance of admiration. She was keeping her head when he and Daish were both in danger of losing theirs.

"Give the boy a chance, anyhow," he said. "Ask him himself whether he were flourishing a long pole to the danger of anyone on horseback. Give him a talking to, Daish." (It was up to Charley to lie, and he did not doubt that she would do so. He could do no more for her, himself.)

"I'm afraid I must give him something more than a talking to," said Daish, rising with a heavy sigh. "I must make the lad understand for his own sake that he must not act like a savage. He may have had some grudge against you, Colonel, of which you know nothing —he takes odd likes and dislikes, and he never forgets even a fancied injury. It may be his gipsy blood, but whatever it is I've got to have it out of him."

A sudden deep dismay made Colonel Thorne raise himself abruptly on his cushions, staring at John Daish's set face and his great frame. An incredible fear seized him that the very safeguard of Charley's assumed sex might prove his undoing.

"What do you mean? What are you going to do?" he said sharply.

"I'm going to give my little lad a thrashing," said John Daish with a sob caught in his throat as if the very words were bitter. "I hate laying a finger on him—I've struck him once before, and I said I never would again, unless he forced me. But this is too much, if it's true. He will understand—he *must*."

"But you can't!"—Colonel Thorne almost stammered in his horror. John's great height and heavy hands assumed ominous proportions, and he turned a little sick to think of it—a girl—a woman—in that grasp! "Look here, Daish, for God's sake don't do anything

when your wool's up!" he said with a queer mixture of the sublime and ridiculous in his earnestness and his slang. "For my sake—because I ask it—let the thing go, and don't speak to the boy at all. It won't mend my leg, and I'd rather not be the cause of—of—— He's such a slip of a thing!" he ended helplessly. "You'd half kill him."

But he had calculated without the inherent doggedness of Daish's race when they got an idea into their minds. It was evident that the man hated the thought of hitting the boy—his little lad!—as he said. His eyes were wet with tears, and his voice broke when he spoke; but it did not turn him from his purpose for one moment.

"He must learn," he said simply. "If he owns up I must punish him."

"That's the very way to teach him to lie."

"You don't know Charley, sir. He never lies—to me."

A dreadful fear entered Colonel Thorne's mind that perhaps he did not know Charley—that for some fine faith in her that he had never reached she would speak the truth, and stand to it. And then? Would she bear her punishment—the pain and the humiliation—as well, or confess to her sex and save herself? She might even be mad enough to choose the thrashing; and had it been a woman who knew her secret she might, understanding women, have let her. But Colonel Thorne saw something else, and that was the man's point of view, for he knew that it was impossible for him to let Daish do this thing in ignorance, and shame his manhood.

He turned abruptly to Lillias, who was still a silent listener, her work in her hands but her grave eyes turned from one to the other as they spoke.

"Lillias, will you shut the door?" he said, unconscious that he had used her name, for before John he generally spoke of her as "your cousin" or "Miss Daish."

She rose at once at his bidding and shut the door as he wished, returning to her seat by the lamp to look and listen. Her beautiful face was in the arc of light, whereas the two men were almost in shadow, and she had the curious and unstudied effect of a goddess in silent judgment.

"I've something to tell you in my turn, Daish," said Thorne seriously. "I don't want to—I'd rather leave it to Charley—I don't want to interfere. But in your case I should never forgive the other man if—God! this is hard!" he exclaimed in genuine distress, and felt the sweat break out on his forehead. "This boy—who is so unlike other boys—did you never guess?"

"What do you mean?" The lines in Daish's face seemed to deepen, his breath sounded hard and thick across the room. Lillias laid the useless work down, and folded her hands in her lap, waiting also.

"I recognised—Charley—one day in your fields," said Thorne slowly. He did not look at either of the cousins now. "I spoke to . . . her."

The one word seemed to fall into the silence like thunder. It seemed as if the little unpretentious parlour were always to be the scene of a tragedy too great for it. John Daish threw his hands up with a

cry like some dumb thing in pain, and staggered to his feet.

"She is Carlotta Edison, the girl who imitates street arabs so wonderfully," said Thorne as if he could not get the words out quickly enough. "She came down here for a freak—a chance adventure—after she had been laid up and was getting restless with the inactivity of her convalescence. She is not to be judged like other people—she's always been a law to herself, and she does mad things. I told her she had no right—I told her to go back."

His clear troubled voice paused. Again there was no sound in the room but John's heavy breathing. But he looked like a man who had had a mortal blow, so that he rocked on his feet as he stood.

"Will you tell us the rest, please?" said Lillias at last.

"There is nothing much to tell." Ted Thorne began to feel that the situation was beyond him, and to grow desperate. "I had known her in London, and I knew what she was, how little to be reckoned with. I tried to frighten her into a confession or to going away—I threatened to tell Daish myself, but I never meant to. It was up to her to do that, but she wouldn't. She wanted to stay, and—and she's a woman!" He flung the words at them as all the explanation left to him. "But she thought I might give it away, I suppose, and it drove her mad. She must have concluded that I was going to Leith that morning when she rushed out at me in the spinney. Whether she planned it all or did it on impulse I don't know. Probably it was impulse. Charley has got a heart some-

where, poor little kid. But she doesn't always know what she's doing." He spoke with the leniency of his own kindness and the tolerance of a man of the world, almost as if he apologised for some unfortunate creature whose disadvantages were not its fault. He glanced at Lillias as if to see if she understood and sympathised, but now her eyes were cast down and he could read nothing in her composed face. He turned to Daish rather helplessly.

"I don't know what Charley would have done if you had asked her point blank about the accident," he said. "If you say she doesn't lie to you she would probably have owned to that without telling you who she was. And then, if you had threatened to give her a hiding—I don't know. She is quite capable of taking that too! And, as a man, I couldn't let another man . . . you see?"

He looked at the giant rocking on his feet, the poor beautiful face torn by hideous passion, and he sank into helpless silence. Here was something he could not cope with, that almost awed him. Let Charley deal with the havoc she had wrought! Thorne almost ground his teeth to think of her, the little——! (he used an ugly word). He wished he could make them, these people of another world, understand that she was not worth heartbreak, or the trouble that she caused. They were too good for her—perhaps for him, Ted Thorne, also, as she had said. She had plunged her little ruthless hands into the depths of a great soul to soil and stain it with ugly experience, and she was too slight a thing to cause such tragedy.

But John Daish was feeling his way across the room

like one who is drunk, clutching at the familiar furniture to keep him on his feet, and with never a word of farewell or excuse for his departure. As he went he sobbed, and they heard him sobbing still—awfully—as he fumbled at the door and reeled down to the gate.

Quick and emotional also, the scene had been too much for Thorne. He put his hands over his eyes and brushed away the tears that had gathered there. He did not see what Lillias was doing, but a few minutes later he found her standing by his side with a glass of warm milk, as if nothing had happened.

"I have put some whiskey in it," she said steadily. "It will make you sleep. And Saunders wants to know if you will go to bed now?"

Thorne looked up gratefully while she held the glass for him as though he had been a baby.

"You always do the right thing, Lillias," he said. "How am I going to get on without you?"

"You will be well then," said Lillias simply.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GOING OF THE BOY

SUMMER had lingered late, and the September nights were warmer than those of June had been. As he walked rapidly down the road to Leith Farm the soft wind fanned John Daish's fevered face and lifted the thick hair on his forehead, but though he was aware of the relief of being out in the open air he was not conscious of his surroundings any more than he knew that he had left his cousin's cottage bareheaded. His powerful hands opened and shut as if gripping on something, and he lifted his stricken face to the smooth starry sky with eyes that held the bewildered pain of a child. He had not suffered such a sense of loss since that day when his old father had told him in a final, matter-of-fact tone that his dreams of college were tomfoolery, and he must make up his mind to an office stool and getting on in the world of commerce. He remembered how he had taken his trouble to the quiet fields and the open night, then as now, and the surge of impotent anger in his rash, boyish veins; but looking back it seemed to him a farce to what he suffered now. For he had not learned to hunger then, or to carry an empty heart for years only to have it filled for a little to overflowing, and then emptied in one short half-hour.

There was no one on the deserted road to see him go rocking by, his breath gasping and breaking with short exclamations now and then to relieve the tension of his brain. If there had been, the scandalised neighbours would have said that farmer Daish was tight for once, and shamefully full of liquor. And indeed the passion in him worked like wine, and made him dizzy, thick in utterance, and no longer master of his limbs. He clutched at his own gate when he reached it at last and nearly shut his dog out, but that Hector kept close to his heels with the wistful intuition of his kind that something was dreadfully wrong with his master and he must not be left. The great mongrel followed Daish into the house instead of going to his guard at the door as usual, and lay down in the parlour with watchful eyes upon that unsettled figure; but John did not even see him. He was waiting for what was to come—for the encounter that must occur when Charley came to the nightly tryst for his hour's study.

There was a small hand-lamp on the mantelshelf, burning as he had left it when he went hurriedly out from that stormy interview with his housekeeper. Mrs. Skelton had gone to bed in tears—so much he knew, though he had forgotten what he said to make her cry. He had been angry because of the fear in his heart—the fear that her words were true, and he should have to punish Charley. But it seemed a trivial thing to what had actually occurred, and Colonel Thorne's revelation. Why had this thing happened to him? Why had the girl lied and acted and fooled him for the caprice of her disordered fancy, and insisted on continuing the deception even when

recognised by Thorne? Horrible suspicions of her past life and character made their present intercourse a degraded thing in the turmoil of his mind. He would rather that she had been the thing she represented herself—a waif of the roads and streets—even if a girl, than the favourite of the public, the notorious success of the variety stage. He knew her name well enough—even in his indifferent detachment from such things he could not help hearing of Carlotta Edison—but he had never heard the packed house shout "Charley!" to her across the footlights, or seen her dressed as the *gamin* that was her forte, until, alas! he had seen it unconsciously at these very doors . . .

There was a sound in the garden, the rustle of the dark roses outside the window, and something climbing in. He seized the lamp and held it high as if to guide her—really to see plainly for once this cheat who had never given so successful an impersonation on the stage. The little light figure scrambled over the window-seat as usual, and Charley stood in the room, the raised lamplight falling on the round black head and the healthy tan of her face. Daish did not move or speak. He was gazing at her with an incredulity that was almost a wild hope for a minute. Her appearance was so exactly that of a thin growing lad that he could not fasten one vicious attribute of her sex upon her. There was no curve of bosom or softness of outline, hardly a feminine beauty that could be imagined in the wiry figure and active limbs under the well-worn jersey and knickerbockers. She looked up to see why he stood so silent with the raised lamp, and his heart sank. In the great black eyes he

saw something that he had never recognised before. It was a woman looking out of them, and a woman in love. In that brief moment while they stood there face to face, with the lamp held high in John's hands, he knew the reason of all his yearning over this supposed boyhood—his "little lad" that he had deceived himself in wanting for his son. His own manhood had met and recognised the attraction in her, but his mind had seen nothing but what she showed him of disguise. And she loved him. He knew that also in the blinding pain and stabbing joy of seeing her as she was—the pain of her being degraded in his eyes, the joy of mutual passion.

Charley had opened her lips for the usual shy greeting, and the words, "Evening, guv'nor. All safe?" They were never uttered. Her eyes widened until the pupils were distended, and she thrust her head a little forward, peering at him. Then it seemed as if words were needless, for with a strangled cry she put her hands up to her frightened face.

"Yes," said Daish slowly, and with difficulty. "I have seen Colonel Thorne. I forced him to tell me." Even then his large sense of justice made him fair to Thorne. The girl should not think that it had been a willing betrayal. He put the lamp carefully back on the mantelpiece with a movement as if his hands were stiff and hardly under his control, and crossing the room with one stride he caught her by the shoulder even as Thorne himself had done in the meadow.

"Tell me," he said in a curious low voice, "why did you do this thing? What was my life to you that you should want to wreck it?" He was past pretences

now; he did not take his stand upon the ground that she had done an impudent and outrageous thing in living as a farm-boy amongst rough men, or her deception of himself which might seriously implicate him if it came to light. All that seemed unimportant compared to the deeper wrong she had done him in his personal life.

"Tell me!" he said with ominous gentleness.

"I didn't mean to do it—not at first—" she breathed the words through her shielding hands. "I had been ill, I was lightheaded still, I think. I wanted to get out and go about the markets as usual, like a boy. And I got tired and fell asleep in your van because of the smell of the lavender—it seemed to draw me. And then when you found me in the hay, and showed me the lavender fields, I wanted to stay—I couldn't go away again!"

"Was any of it true—what you told us about yourself—or was it all lies?" he asked with an extremity of bitterness that sounded very quiet.

"Some of it was true—about the waifs and strays of London—but if you'd known anything of rescue work you'd have known I wasn't a bit like them. I've been with them and talked to them for the sake of imitating them, but the public won't have the real thing—no one would stand it! It was true about the 'gleaners'—the nuns who work down East told me that—and that part about sleeping on the roofs of sheds is in the Barnado Boys' records. But I'm a stage arab—you'd have seen it if you hadn't been so easy to gull."

In her earnestness she had dropped her hands, and looked up at him with a breathless anxiety to see how he took it. The habit of slang remained

with her—always did, if he could but have known it—but her Cockney accent was all gone. He knew now why it left her in moments of great excitement or stress of emotion. It had been carefully assumed, but it must have been difficult to keep up always as she had kept it up through the first weeks of her life on the farm.

"Why didn't you—run away again—while there was time?" he said, still with that difficult forcing of the words.

Her eyes fell from his, and she trembled all through her slight body. "I did try—but you brought me back!" she said.

Daish suddenly loosed his hold of her, and groaned as if he had been vitally wounded. He remembered how he had beaten her when her inexplicable jealousy of Lillias had made her foul-mouthed as a virago, and her fury when Mrs. Skelton had struck her in turn for coming into this very room. On both occasions she had tried to go, and he had brought her back, as she said. If it had not been for Colonel Thorne's intervention he might have thrashed her again; and a fear of his own passion made him feel that there would be a savage joy in revenging his primitive manhood upon her now. To bruise and stripe her, and then to use her for his own wicked pleasure, was a temptation so dreadful that it was as if the devil had entered in and were urging it upon him. He could not see her face for the rush of blood to his eyes and the thunder of his heart, but across the din of his own senses he heard her little voice.

"John!" she said pleadingly.

His training came back then, all the traditions of his

life with their nobility of civilisation—that a man's strength is given him to control, that he may not even fight his fellow-man unfairly, or be cruel to anything weaker. The brute and the bully and the coward of a moment since fell from John Daish; for whatever she had done she was a woman. . . .

"Go now, before this thing is ever found out," he said harshly, shaking with his fear of himself. "And never come into my life again."

"Not before you forgive me!" she said desperately.

"I shall never forgive you."

"Why?"

"Because you have stolen something from me that you can't give back—because of the trust you have murdered, the delight you have lost me, the love of my 'little lad' who will always be as a dream-child in my heart. It is worse than if you had died, for I know now that you have never existed—not as I saw you."

"You loved me as Charley—why don't you love me still?" she said quickly. "You do—you do! It was *me* you loved, not the boy that I acted for you."

She came boldly across the room to him, and seized his arm with her little hard hands. "You shall forgive me at least," she said fiercely. "For I will not go without it. Why are you so hard? We love each other, John—I want no man in the world as I do you. I can be good for you, and quiet, and like any happy ordinary woman who has her man and is satisfied with him. Listen! Listen!—I am only restless and unhappy and craving for excitement all the time because of the want of you, though I never knew what it was that I wanted. I can make you happy too—I know I

can. You don't want a girl like your cousin Lillias, beautiful and kind though she is; she's too like you, you would bore each other, and drone on together without ever being satisfied. I'm not like that—not beautiful and not kind—I'm wicked sometimes, and I'm never the same two days together. But I'm *myself*. And it's me that you want."

He looked at her as if half fascinated through her quick decisive speech, and he saw that it was true. She could be good for him—and perhaps for him only. In his protection and the shelter of his love she would not stray nor need to stray. But he saw her, fatally, as the mother of his children and the mistress of his house, and he remembered that she might not bring him a clean record—that he dared not ask for it. The woman he married must be as straight as he was himself. It was the Daish tradition. Of anything less than marriage he would not think—he had thrust that from him once already.

"How long is it since you were such friends with Thorne?" he asked abruptly. It was almost as if he struck her with the words.

"Why do you ask that—now?"

"Because I know what you are—I feel it," he said harshly. "Come! out with it—he was one of your men friends?"

"It was such a little while—and so long ago," she faltered as if dazed by his rude attack. Then her spirit flared up in honest indignation. "You have no right to ask me questions of Ted Thorne or any other man! I have not offered you the past, but the present."

He gave a short hard laugh. "A long time ago!"

he said scornfully. "Why, how old are you? Nineteen? Twenty? You cannot be more, to look like a boy of fourteen successfully—a boy underfed and undeveloped too! It must have been but a year or so since—and there have been others in the interim. Dear God! and you would like to fool me in turn." He swung round on her fiercely. "Take yourself off, as I told you to do. You have your own world—that is all right for you, I suppose—but you are not fit for mine."

She stood still for a moment looking at him, as if she would take in his great figure and the distorted beauty of his face. The little lamp burned steadily, and its light caught the crisp ripples of his sunny hair and the hot colour in his cheeks. His eyes were quite blue in their intensity, and his features seemed more ruggedly perfect than ever before. A princely man in his terrible beauty, rather than a yeoman farmer.

In the pause the dog Hector rose and walked slowly across the room, laying his great jowl on the girl's arm.

"Hector has forgiven me, though he hated me once," she said slowly. "*He* wants me to stay!"

"You saved Hector's life. You have lost me mine."

"Oh," she exclaimed with a bitter little cry, "how *hard* good people are!"

He did not answer. In the very excitement of his accusations he had somewhat lost his control of himself, and his harshness was the result. For he felt the blood flushing his great veins, and he was afraid of some impulse of Nature that should land them both in a common ruin. He had fought his passion down once when it took the form of mere brutality and revenge. Now it surged over him in a subtler form, and

he shook as if with ague. The house was very still. All sounds from the room overhead had ceased, and the muffled ticking of clocks was all that broke the silence. He was alone with her, unknown to his household, and with no one to say him nay if he chose to take advantage of the night. For she would not refuse, or if she would he was very much the stronger It almost seemed as if she owed him this poor compensation for all that she had stolen from him—the lad who might have been to him as a son, had he ever existed, or the woman he might have openly loved had she lived within the laws of his rigid ideal. He could not respect her, but he loved her none the less with an instinct beyond all his traditions. Let him take her then, since it was only on the lowest plane that they could reach each other.

Then, through the rushing in his ears as before, he heard her voice speaking and sobbing both together.

"I'm very young still—I knew evil before I ever knew good, and there was no one to tell me. Don't judge me as you might a woman who had had her chance. . . . I'm going now, and I shan't come back. . . . When you hear of me, don't take it for granted that it's something bad. You'll hear plenty of lies. . . ." The little sobbing voice drifted further off, and before he could collect himself she had sprung out of the open window again with all Charley's agility.

The last whisper came from the odours of the starlit garden, like a wail—"I loved you, John !—I would have stayed with you. I loved you. . . ."

Then the cool night wind fluttered through the empty room, chilling his human senses as if Death itself had touched him in passing.

CHAPTER XIV

AT MIDNIGHT

It was seldom that Lillias Daish could not sleep, but the events of the evening had affected her more deeply than her composure betrayed. The almost incredible deception that Charley had practised at Leith farm would have been something to wonder at in itself, but its results were further reaching. Lillias had a mind that worked slowly, but with mathematical precision. She could make none but remorseless deductions from known facts, and she had never known the mercy of self-deception. Long before John Daish had asked himself torturing questions as to Colonel Thorne's acquaintance with Carlotta Edison, Lillias had grasped and accepted the suggestion of his knowledge of the girl—a knowledge that betrayed its intimacy in every excuse he made for her character. Lillias was a Daish as well as John, and had imbibed the same principles as to the difference between good and bad in men and women, which included no plea for extenuating circumstances. The only difference between her and her cousin was that John judged by his mind's dictation and Lillias by her heart's instinct. People who have never cultivated a habit of logical thought at all are usually more bigoted and narrow-minded than those who

have; but in this case it was the reverse, perhaps because Lillias' nature was as gravely beautiful as her face. She thought no more evil than the Madonna lilies in her garden; and in consequence evil had no power to distort her mind.

But the situation required to be thought out and readjusted. She had not imagined her hero to be perfect, but his faults and follies had lain afar off, with a general possibility but no particular application. Now she had to face the idea of another woman in Thorne's life, and one whom she had definitely seen. It might be one of many—but until faced with the one it had been easier to tolerate the many. It might be a brief thing and very much of the past—but she was none the less aware of the shock of its having existed.

Lillias let down her thick, rich-coloured hair and slowly brushed it. The rhythmical action soothed her and kept time to her thoughts. She was going through much the same crisis as John Daish, but without the turmoil which in the man resulted in a different conclusion. For Lillias knew as well as John that she had fallen in love, and that the object was by no means her ideal. He was indeed the last hero of whom she would have dreamed, and his influence upon her life had for the moment confused her quiet acceptance of destiny. She had imagined herself loving a man a few years her senior, her equal in station, one whose world had been practically the same as her own, with mutual interests, and with a record as clean and honest as her own, despite masculine human nature. Colonel Thorne was none of these things, and had her mind ruled her as his did John Daish, she would have had to reject all

idea of Thorne as able to hold a place in her heart. But all that Lillias saw was the plain fact that she loved him. Far older than herself as he was, having lived his life out in surroundings of which she could hardly conceive, belonging to what her own family still quaintly called "the gentry" as distinct from themselves, *roué* perhaps, and certainly not blameless with regard to women—still she knew that she loved him, and that the record against him could not detract from that love at all, though it might sadden it. What was the use of saying, "He is this—he is that—therefore I do not of course care for him," when she knew that she did? Lillias was wiser in her simplicity than John with his cultivated power of reason.

She looked in the glass at her face, and sighed. The shadow of her hair fell over her broad, low forehead and into her contemplative eyes, but she saw that she was very fair, and she knew that men were driven mad for the moment by her face, and would do any rash regretful thing for its sake. But beauty was not everything—could not be, since he had been attracted once by a girl with little or none. She knew that Charley had no chance against her as far as looks went—mere perfection of flesh and blood—but there must be some strange charm in her to have appealed to two such opposite natures as Thorne's and John Daish's.

"I am a stupid woman," thought Lillias with rare revolt. "And she is very clever. Oh, why could not God give me brains as well as long hair and a smooth skin and large eyes?"

Then the old patience came back to her face, the toleration of herself as she was without amelioration or

self-flattery. To tolerate *ourselves* is generally the last lesson that we learn in life ; but Lillias had learned hers early. She drew the white wrapper round her and shivered a little in the cool air blowing in at her window, for the wrapper was only muslin—a pretty thing made by her own hands with some misgiving that it was not very serviceable. "But then mother liked me to have nice things," she had said in sweet self-excuse. "And it does very well for the summer."

The kitchen clock striking downstairs made her start with the guilty consciousness that it was midnight, and she rose to finish undressing, and put her dreams quietly on one side.

Hark! what was that? Gravel or something thrown against her window? "It must be John come back," she thought hastily. "I hope nothing has happened . . . and he might wake Colonel Thorne."

Her room was in the front of the cottage, the same as the sitting-room where Thorne still slept, but not over it, fortunately. She moved swiftly to the window, and looked down into the darkened garden. There, below her, almost in the bed of roses that grew nearest to the door, was a small dark figure—not the one that she looked to see, for she had expected John's massive frame, and his face violently disturbed as she had seen it last. For a minute she thought her senses had deceived her, and then she recognised Charley, with a throb of wild fear at her heart for what might have happened at Leith.

"Lillias!" came an anguished cry beneath her, "Lillias Daish—come down and speak to me, for God's sake!"

"Hush!—you will wake other people," said Lillias quietly. "Stay where you are. I will come down and let you in."

She did not wait to put on a cloak or coil up her hair. With its great mass swinging over her shoulders she opened her door softly and crept down the stairs, still mindful that Thorne was asleep. Her firm light hands drew back the bolt and unlocked the door, and she stood aside in the little hall-passage, beckoning her strange visitor to come in without further question.

"I must speak to you," said Charley wildly, her cold fingers clasping themselves round the older girl's finely muscular arm. "You are kind as well as good, and you will help me. You promised, that day you met me in the village. I have not a friend in the world to-night, Lillias, unless you will be one to me."

"I will take you up to my room," said Lillias gently. A sudden rush of pity flooded her heart, driving all the pain and bitterness out of it with a warmth she did not understand or question. She put her strong arm round Charley's slight shoulders to guide her down the passage, and felt her quiver. "Come quietly," she said below her breath. "for we have an invalid here—Colonel Thorne."

The younger girl started and almost hung back. "I had forgotten," she said. "You will hate me. I might have killed him!"

Lillias' lips set themselves hard, but she did not flinch. This was no time to look back on what might have been, or to accuse Charley of hideous intentions. It was her instinct to give help and protection, and Charley needed both. In the small things of life Lillias

Daish might be slow-witted and almost dull, but when something difficult almost to greatness was asked of her she had that touch of the sublime that does not fail.

The two girls crept lightly down the passage, almost as if they were conspirators ; but as they passed the sitting-room door Lillias heard her name called for the second time with no less urgency than Charley had used.

"Lillias—Lillias, come in here—I want you!"

She only paused for one moment to draw Charley with her. "We must go in," she said decidedly. "Colonel Thorne has heard us."

There was a faint light in the sitting-room, as it was left at night in case the invalid wanted anything. Colonel Thorne had raised himself on his pillows, and was looking with quick expectant eyes at the door as the two figures entered. "I heard you talking," he said. "And Charley call. Light the lamp, Lillias."

She did so in silence, her eyes concentrated on what she was doing, as usual, and without allowing them to stray to those two other faces so much more agitated than her own. It was Charley who spoke first, without being questioned.

"Yes, I've left Leith," she said in a hard, short voice. "I'm not going back. I want Lillias to lend me clothes—a skirt—anything that will pass muster."

"You can't go to-night!" exclaimed Thorne involuntarily. "It is past twelve o'clock. I heard it strike."

"I must."

"Don't be silly," said Thorne, almost pettishly—

somehow Lillias knew that he had said just those words many a time before to Charley's irrational impulses. "How can you get away through the night?"

"I came through the night, and I'll leave the same way. Don't worry, Ted. I can always find my way, somehow. Old training, I suppose."

They seemed to have forgotten Lillias, lighting the lamp in silence while they talked. She looked at Charley collectedly, measuring her height. The shortest skirt in her wardrobe would be too long to be anything but absurdly in the way, but there was something—a short rain-coat—that would cover up her boyish disguise. That would do. She left the room so quietly that they hardly noticed, and fetched it, bringing also a close velvet hat almost like a bonnet that would not be noticeable on her short hair. When she re-entered the room they were still talking, oblivious of her.

"I don't want money," Charley was saying, almost rudely in her fierce rejection of his offer. "I've always had some with me. I'll take the clothes—I'd sooner borrow from Lillias than from you."

"Well, you needn't put it that way!" said Thorne with the quick resentment of his temperament. "I would not have betrayed you if Daish had not forced me to it."

"Oh, it's all right," she answered restlessly in her pain. "He told me he had forced you—I didn't think you'd gone back on me."

"Did he tell you how?"

"No."

"He threatened to thrash you for causing my accident."

"I wish you had let him!" she said, throwing up her square chin with a reckless movement. "It would not have hurt half so much as what he said to me."

Thorne was silent, but by no means through agreement. He lay back on his pillows, his grey hair ruffled into short rings in a fashion that would have shocked him had he known it, and watched Lillias quietly wrapping the raincoat over Charley's dark sweater and knickerbockers, and pressing the velvet hat down over her round black head to keep it on. The transformation made her more pathetic, rather than ludicrous, the white face looking out from its dark frame, pinched and drawn, and the eyes alight with pain. It was obvious that she had really come for the clothes, for, her object gained, she turned to the door without thanks, save that she still held one of Lillias' hands tight between her own small, hot palms. On the threshold she turned and looked back at Thorne, speaking with deep meaning.

"I told you once that if I went out of these people's lives you ought to go too," she said. "You know that what I say is true—you and I are not fit to black their shoes. I'm not coming back—I'm never going to see John Daish again of my own will." She caught her breath, but spoke on steadily. "If you have any decent feeling, Ted, it's up to you to do the same. Don't deceive yourself into thinking that because you're a man you'll be forgiven any more than I am. They can't forgive; they may pity, but they can't forgive!"

She suddenly turned her stricken face to Lillias' breast and hid it there, shaking with sobs. For a

minute the older girl held her quietly in her strong arms ; then she led her out of the room. There was a short pause and a murmur of voices at the cottage door, and then light feet hurrying down to the gate through which John Daish had stumbled a few hours before.

"I asked her to stay until daylight at least—I promised to let her go in the dawn, but she would not hear reason. It was impossible to keep her," said Lillias as she re-entered the room. "Shall I put out the lamp again? Can you sleep? I am sorry we disturbed you."

"Reason! when did she ever hear reason?" said Thorne, disregarding her matter-of-fact suggestions. "I believe she really has gipsy blood in her veins—what her origin is Heaven knows! Banister, the great Variety Show man, discovered her in a charitable home when she was sixteen, and had her trained. She was a waif and stray when she was brought to the home. That's all I know of her." He glanced half anxiously at Lillias standing with her hand on the lamp. "You want to get rid of me, and go to bed, don't you, dear?" he said gently.

"When you are ready."

"I shan't sleep—after all these scenes—and what she said——"

"Let me give you some aspirin."

"Oh, damn the aspirin!" said Thorne furiously, looking at her unconscious face as she stood in her soft muslin with the flood of her splendid hair falling round her. She had entirely forgotten that she was without her gown and that she had let her hair down,

though almost any other woman would have remembered it with one small flaw of satisfaction in her most secret consciousness. All her kind troubled heart was engrossed with Charley for the minute—Charley going out across the fields at night with her stricken face, and the poor, passionate heart that John had wounded with his rigid principles and his admirable ideals! She had shown no trace of softness until the moment when she hid her face on Lillias' bosom; yet the older girl knew that, ill-regulated and impossible as she was, the tragedy of that parting with John Daish had been a real force in her life that might make or mar it for ever.

"Lillias, come here!"

She had so put her own affairs on one side that she started when Thorne's voice recalled her to herself, and came slowly across the room to him—too slowly for his impatience. He stretched out his hand and caught her wrist, almost dragging her to the bedside.

"Did you hear what Charley said to me?" he said. "Do you want me to go out of your life?" He caught a great strand of her golden hair and twisted it round his nervous fingers so that it gleamed and burned in the lamplight. "Would you marry me if I asked you, Lillias?" he said, and his voice was far more wooing than the bald question.

The tears welled up slowly in her eyes, so that they looked dark and colourless. Yet he thought involuntarily of the lavender fields after a shower of rain.

"You don't want to ask me," she said simply.

"Perhaps I don't, but I can't help myself," he retorted. He spoke on the impulse of the moment.

Unfortunately she saw a more ominous meaning in it for that very reason. Just as there is truth in wine there is truth in the sentence that catches us unawares.

"Don't ask me only because I'm pretty," she said earnestly. "We've gone through a lot to-night, and you're not yourself—you would be sorry to-morrow. I shouldn't like that."

Yes, on the morrow he would have pause to remember her situation in life, her upbringing, her surroundings, her relations. For there was a picture in her mind of which he knew nothing—a picture of a stout woman in an aggressive violet coat and skirt, whose flushed face and common voice had jarred even her placidity in this very room. Once more the poison of Mrs. Jennings' presence was in Lillias' nostrils—the "bad smell" of evil, as the sick lady of the vicarage had called it in a never-forgotten phrase. There was no need to tell Colonel Thorne of all this—it was only a question of renouncement and then to keep silence.

But her hesitation had the result of increasing his ardour, without design on her part. "I suppose this really means that you can't forgive me," he said with the disappointment of a spoilt child. "You are like John, as Charley said—you want all your world to be saints."

"Oh no—I suppose you are only just like a man," said Lillias. There is no weakness for which that excuse is not valid, in the feminine mind. "I'd rather not talk about it; please don't ask me anything more, for your own sake." She spoke quite calmly, and his hand loosened on hers with a sense of blank discouragement; but at the same moment a great tear fell

glistening on the tress of hair that was slipping through his fingers, making them both start.

"Tears, Lillias?" he said, and laid his face against her breast even as Charley had done, with a revelation that here was rest and peace for a man's head, a calm, deep nature to soothe troubled nerves, a love that would be faithful however it might be repaid.

"I am not going to repent," he said gravely, "if you do not. I know my own needs—just you, Lillias, and your womanhood. It's a bad bargain for you, darling, but somehow I don't think you mind."

She did not answer in words, but she stood there holding him as if she never wished to let him go, and the silent clasp reassured him that he had at last done wisely and well for himself. The breath of evil passed, and Cousin Sarah Anne Jennings became the secondary consideration that she really was in the deep moment of those two lives. Little annoyances and even small humiliations there must be, perhaps, as there are for all those who venture matrimony; but if he did not mean to repent, Lillias knew in her inner consciousness that she could interpose her own strong, deep nature successfully between him, with his quicker feelings, and the drawbacks of her origin. The tears had dried in her happy eyes, and if the angels ever glow with human warmth they may look as Lillias looked then.

CHAPTER XV

"LAVENDER'S BLUE!"

At the end of July London has a peculiar smell which seems to issue forth from the doors of public-houses, and the back premises of small greengrocers' shops where the vegetables have grown stale. Add to this the clothes of the great population that cannot leave town, and the odour emanating from these and the weary bodies inside them, and it is small wonder that the streets seem depleted of ozone and never to have been watered and aired for ages.

Even in the comfortable modern flats of the region bordering upon Regent's Park the wide windows seemed to admit a stale air that was hopelessly tainted before it reached the well-kept rooms, and yet this part of London stands higher and more healthily than the rest of Belgravia and Mayfair.

"All our best people are out of town, or will be after Goodwood," said the porter of Portland Chambers to the pretty maid at No. 20. "Your lady would go too if it weren't for 'full houses,' eh?" He winked at the girl, but whether from some sense of knowingness in the reference, or whether from more personal motives, it would be unwise to say.

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Cubitt," said the girl

pertly. "We could go if we liked, I suppose, considering that the 'full houses' depend pretty much on us."

"But then she's under contract," expostulated the porter.

"Contract!" said the maid scornfully. "*Contracts* don't hold her, if the mood's on her to cut it. She was under contract last year as soon as she should be able to stand up after 'flu, and no sooner could she do that than she gives us all the slip and leaves Banister to whistle for her! My, there was a shindy! And she never came back till September, neither."

"I heard something was wrong. Who was the gentleman, Miss Patty?"

"That's what everybody asks, and in my opinion they're all wrong," said the lady's maid sharply. "There wasn't a man in it. It was just one of her mad freaks to rough up old Banister and show us she'd do as she liked. I believe she's touched, sometimes."

"I shouldn't like to tell her so!" said the porter with a short laugh. "She looks as if she could skin you alive, when her wool's up."

"My! no one dares say a word to her. I don't go near her myself till eleven, and then like as not it's all wrong. One day she'll be up at five, and leaning out of the window looking at the sunrise and crying, and the next she won't have her coffee till it ought to be her lunch! I'd better see about it now, anyway. Have those flowers come? That's what I came down about."

It seemed more probable that she had come down for a gossip while waiting to take up her capricious mistress's breakfast; but the porter assured her that the

florist had only just sent the usual order, or he would have brought it up, and handed her a heavy sheaf wrapped up in white paper that smelt fragrantly even through the wrappings.

"So many of the flats are shut up that Goodman's may have forgotten a single order, and sent it along a bit late," he said apologetically.

"They'll catch it proper if they don't send her flowers," said Miss Patty with a shrug of her shoulders. "They are the one thing she will have—fresh every day too. She's cracked on flowers. Our bill at Goodman's must be a perisher!" and with a nod to the porter she ran back to the lift and was taken up to the third floor with the flowers, where the housemaid let her in.

"Look slippy, Patty!" she said breathlessly. "She's just rung. Cook's got the tray ready——"

It was a large flat, considering that it was only asked to accommodate one lady and her four maids. The long passages were thickly carpeted and the rooms very well furnished, though there was something rather heterogeneous in the furniture, as if it had been chosen to suit many a passing caprice. As Patty knocked discreetly at her mistress's bedroom door and entered with the tray, she was faced with a great four-post bedstead supported by gilt dragons that grinned at her fiendishly, and which was covered by a wonderful bedspread from the silk bazaars of Bombay; but on the other hand the rest of the furniture was so plain and simple as to be almost austere, and the round hip bath and huge sponges suggested a man's cold douche rather than a woman's warm bath and scented soap.

Under the shaded splendour of the bedspread—gold flushing into cerise, and emerald green borders, as only the native silk mills of Bombay can produce—lay a slight figure that suggested nothing sensuous. The round black head on the pillow was cropped like a boy's, and the clenched hand half buried in the flaring silk was thin and hard rather than delicate and womanly.

"Did you have a better night, miss?" said Patty with a rather deprecating sympathy.

"No—vile," was the short reply. "I only slept for two hours. It's the heat—or the smells. I think London is a sewer. And yet—it is so fresh only a few miles off!"

"You ought to motor out of town for the day, miss—down into Kent or Surrey," began Patty—when she broke off in sheer fright.

Miss Carlotta Edison had suddenly sat up in bed and was looking at her with dull hot eyes that seemed to hold a frenzy of pain or longing. "Put that tray down, and don't bother me with your damned advice!" she said fiercely—so fiercely that the maid began to whimper through surprise and the unexpectedness of the attack.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, miss," she said feebly. "It was only seeing you so worn and really done up with the heat and work. I'm sure I never meant to—no, I never did!"

Her mistress dropped back on the pillows, the sudden heat of anger dying out of her face. "I don't suppose you meant anything," she said in the flat tone of utter weariness. "There—put those flowers where I can

see them, and then go away and don't come back till I ring. I'm going out as soon as I've had my breakfast."

It was a farce at breakfast, just as it had been a farce at sleeping. Carlotta crumbled the toast and flung the food about fiercely—dainty food that the cook had prepared with greater care than she would have used for a less exacting mistress. Sometimes it was impossible to please Miss Edison, who would send dish after dish away untasted, particularly of late.

"She's ruining her 'ealth with late hours and 'ot suppers, and swearing at 'olesome food!" said the staff, who would have marvelled the more if they had known that the lady who could not eat herrings' roes on toast, or cream of chicken, longed feverishly for a round of home-made bread and a slice of home-cured bacon on it, eaten in the dewy morning in the open air; who thought of a rough bed of hay in a stable loft while she tossed under her fine scented sheets and gorgeous silk coverlet. . . .

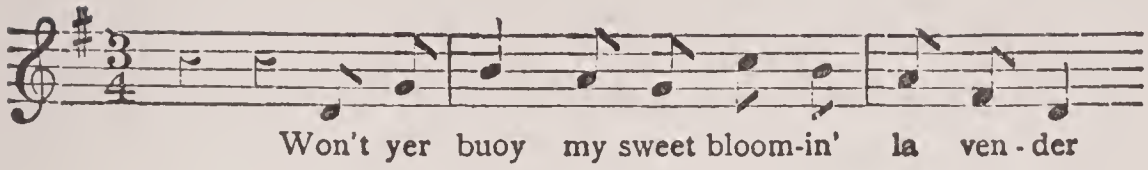
Miss Patty had a trying time dressing her mistress to go out that day. Carlotta was in a sullen temper and ominously quiet. Her small white face was drawn and weary, though not so thin and pinched with illness as the face of a ragged boy who had journeyed down to Leith farm in a lavender van just one year ago. It was lavender time again, even in London; as Miss Edison entered one of the great shops in Regent Street her eye was caught by a pile of extravagant looking little bags tied up with coloured ribbon and labelled "Fresh lavender," three and sixpence. Her ominous brows gathered above the black eyes, and she pushed so

roughly past the counter where they lay that she knocked one to the ground. For a minute she hesitated as if she were about to stoop and pick it up. Then with a shiver she drew back and passed on, leaving a shopman to replace it.

Out again, in the sick glare of the street, the flaccid sunshine and the stuffy smell of humanity. Everything looked a little faded and past its first freshness, even the faces and gowns of passers-by, as if the season itself were jaded. Well, thank God, after Goodwood town would be empty, and the star-turn of the Palace no longer the public's Charley—Charley of the Halls—Charley the London arab impersonator. Miss Edison was bound to show herself at Goodwood and at Cowes; but she would take a holiday in the Isle of Wight, though it was the sort of holiday where one lived on a rich American's yacht and wore high-heeled shoes and played bridge till the small hours, a change of dissipation rather than a rest.

"Curse everything!" said Charley to herself as she saw her varied, excitable life stretching before her; and the malediction fell back on her own heart like a reproach.

Her motor-brougham was standing at the kerb. She suddenly dismissed it, for no reason save that her feet ached to walk off her restlessness, and turning towards Portland Place she hurried aimlessly past the Queens Hall and the Langham, turning to the left to get out of the broader thoroughfare. She was walking towards her own flat unconsciously, when in one of the quieter streets an old raucous voice struck on her ear and brought her to a quivering standstill.



By the edge of the pavement stood a poorly clad woman with a basket of faded lavender—just such a type as she had imitated so successfully in John Daish's stables at Leith, for the benefit of the farm hands. The woman looked ill, as if suffering from some disease, but few of the passers-by gave her even a glance of pity, and no one stopped to buy the skimpy sprays of dead lavender that were all she had to sell. Charley's pause, of course, attracted her attention, and she held out the bunches with a shaking hand and renewed eagerness.

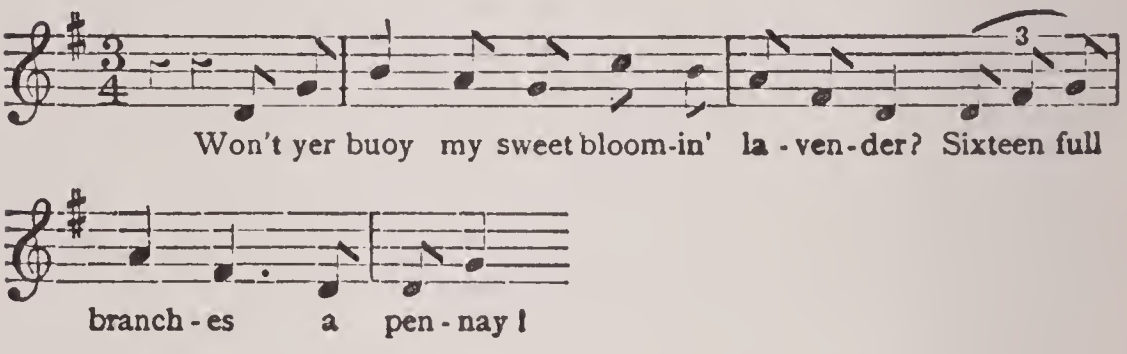
"Do buoy, laidy! I ain't sold a bunch ter-daiy—'pon my soul I ain't! No one seems ter care for the lavender as they used—do buoy!"

Two great tears started to Charley's hot, miserable eyes, and the relief of them was as gentle rain to a parching land. Her hands shook as she opened her gold chain purse and turned the loose silver there into the basket.

"I'll do better than buy," she said impulsively. "I'll sell every bunch for you. Let me stand by you at the kerb—here!"

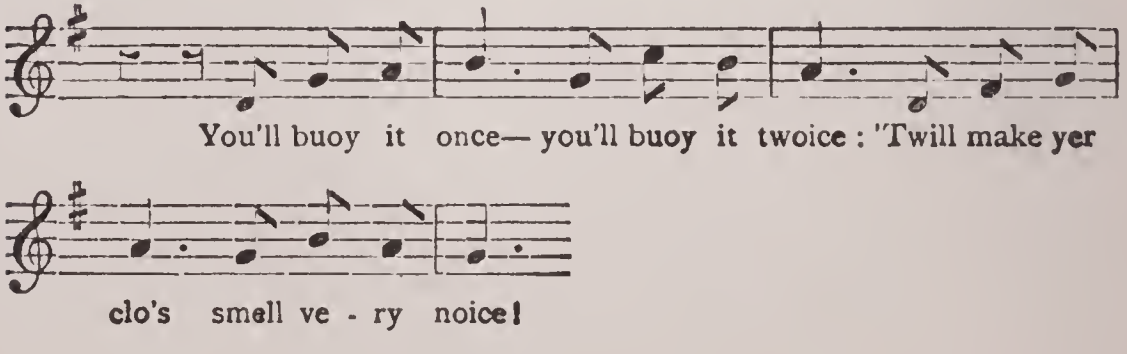
The woman looked bewildered. She would rather have taken the unexpected money and gone away to spend it, perhaps in gin, poor soul. But the stream of blessings on her lips was checked by the curious,

beautifully-dressed girl who turned and stood at her side, facing the passers-by. Then Charley began to sing. Her voice was strong and sweet with the power and freshness of her youth and the training of her profession. She sang exactly what the woman had sung, but had hardly reached the second line before there were three or four people stopping to listen to her, and then a few more, and the inevitable recognition.

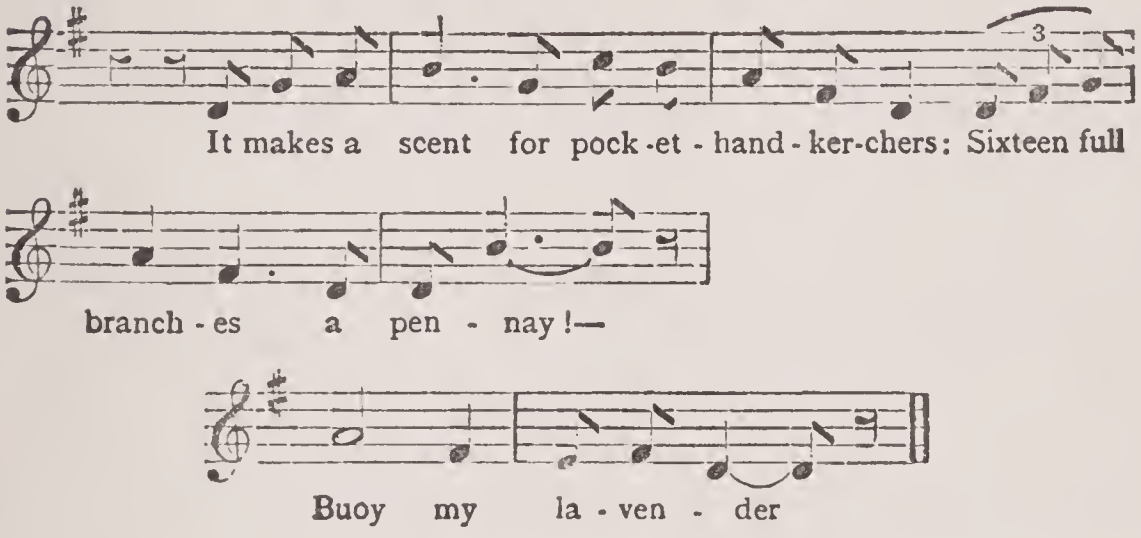


"Why, it's Carlotta Edison, the girl at the Palace!—It's Charley Edison, the music-hall impersonator!"

She heard the whisper and felt the curious glances at her in her smart clothes, but she never faltered.



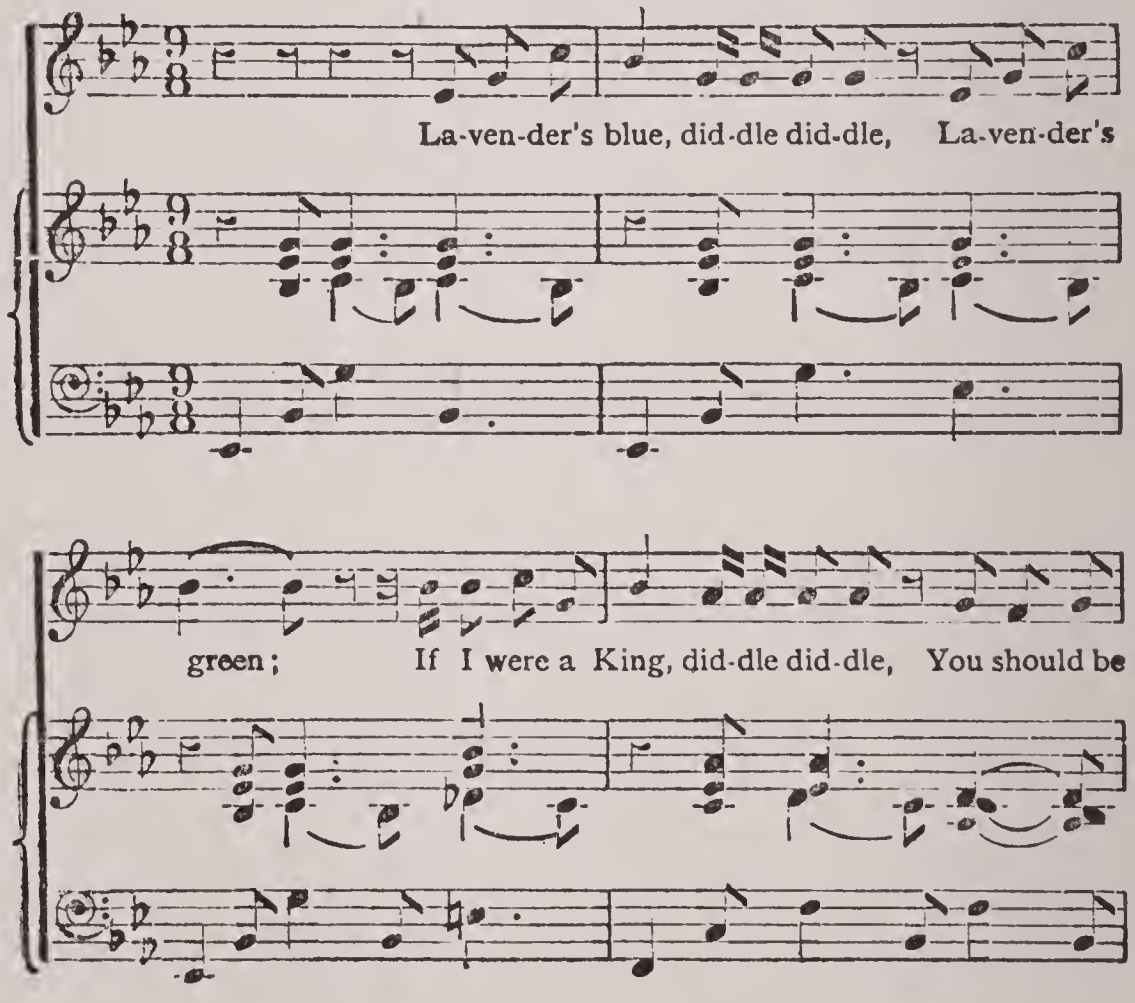
rang the sweet penetrating voice that could "carry" right across the big halls. She stood up, straight and slim as any boy, her white face and black eyes looking over the crowd with the practised indifference of her profession. Facing an audience was second nature to Carlotta Edison.



She half threw out her gloved hands with a gesture of traffic as the last pathetic notes dragged on the exhausted air. The crowd had gathered and gathered until it filled the breadth of the pavement, and a leisurely policeman came round a corner, shouldering his way through the outside stragglers to see what caused the congestion. "It's Charley Edison—little Charley Edison—singing for that poor woman, to help her!" The whisper went from mouth to mouth again, and of course silver and even notes began to fall into the lavender seller's basket. People were rather proud to have recognised the Palace star, liked looking at her nearer, had their sentiment touched by the generous impulse of the girl who sang for hundreds of pounds a

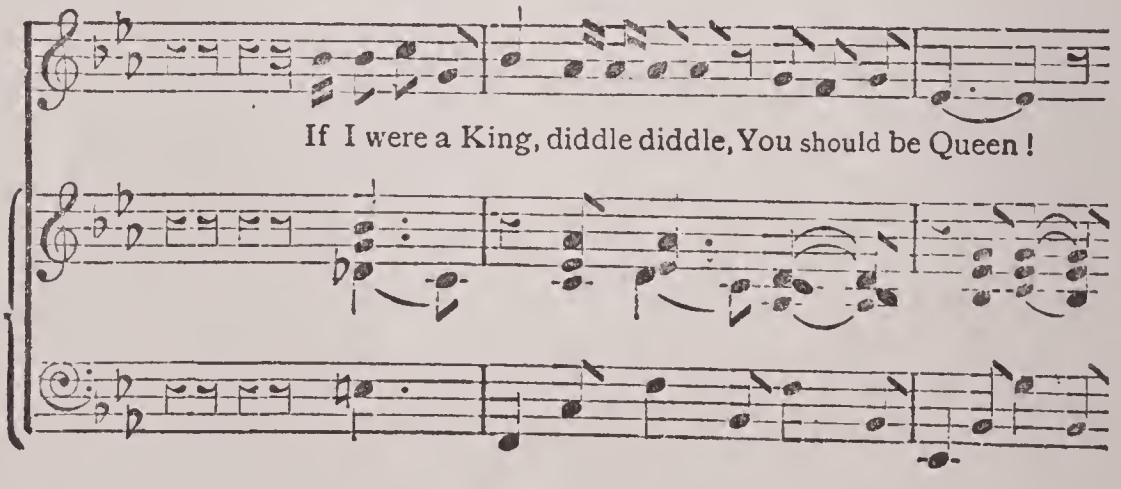
week at the Variety shows, and sang now for nothing to benefit the draggled, uninteresting woman with the lavender basket. There was a hurried explanation being given to the constable, who was hindered in his duty of dispersing the crowd by a public protest.

Charley looked round her improvised theatre, took the temper of her audience by intuitive genius, and changed the tune.




Queen! La-ven-der's blue, did-dle did-dle, La-ven-der's
green; If I were a King, diddle diddle, You should be
Queen!
rall.

A tall man coming down the quiet street paused as others had done, and making use of his unusual stature looked over the heads of the crowd to see what caused it. There was something a little out of keeping with the London streets in his face and figure, though he was dressed in an ordinary morning suit of blue serge, well cut enough, and wore a soft hat like so many men in the heat of the waning season. Perhaps it was the marked beauty of the face under the soft hat that made him a little startling, so that one or two people who glanced at him as he came along looked again, distracted even from the novel entertainment at the kerb. His face had a certain tragedy in it too, for all its handsome lines, and it was so worn that the features looked a trifle rugged. His dark blue eyes rested for a moment on the face of the girl who was singing without any recognition but a certain amused contempt, as if he found the apparent charity of the incident nothing but an advertisement after all. Then he walked steadily onward, going towards Oxford Circus, followed by the unfaltering notes of that arresting voice:



Charley did not grow any whiter, or faint, or lose her self-possession. But her little face was twisted for a moment as if with mute agony. She had seen John Daish again, in a public street in London, and he had passed her without a word, without any sign of recognition, almost without lingering. No doubt her somewhat dramatic way of assisting the lavender woman had been denounced by his grim judgment as merely the desire to attract attention to herself. She guessed his mental attitude with a blank feeling of despair, the while her heart dropped down from its mad leap at the sight of him, fluttered, and was still. She was thankful that the policeman's patience was exhausted, and that he was dispersing the crowd; thankful that for the minute she need sing no more and act no more, for she could have done neither. Her lips trembled a little as she tried to smile at her protégé, and helped her to gather up her almost miraculous harvest and hide the money in a worn bag hidden beneath her gown. Then she went slowly homewards, vaguely aware that people were still looking at her, some even following her under a pretence of going the same way. Her feet seemed heavy and her head light. She was conscious of nothing but the shock of seeing John's face, suddenly, across the crowd, and his cruel eyes.

"I never thought I should see him again," she told herself fiercely, with clenched hands. "And now that I have done so it is worse than it was before. He would thrust me into hell with just that face—he *has* thrust me there, with his damned creed and his law of what women and men ought to be. There is no mercy for such as I am, and no pity. Just as well go to hell,

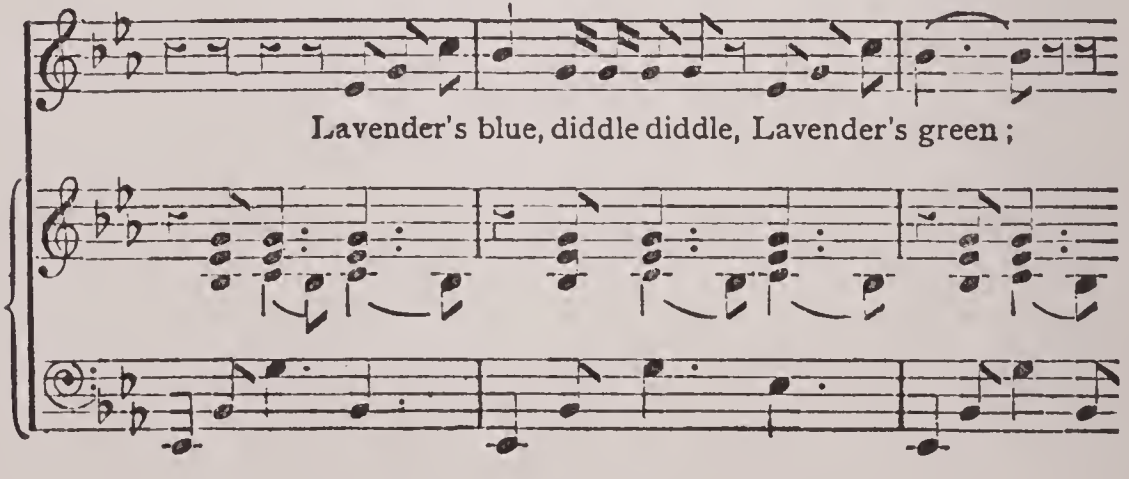
and fulfil my destiny." She laughed, rocking to and for with her hands pressed on her breast as she had done the night that Ted Thorne had recognised her in the Leith pastures, and she had confessed her love for Daish.

Just a year since she had first gone to the lavender farm—ten months or less since she had seen him. Time enough in which to grow wise and to wear off the poignancy of her passion and its hurt. Yet the luxurious room in the expensive flat echoed to a cry as bitter as had broken from her in the parlour at Leith, the night that they had parted:

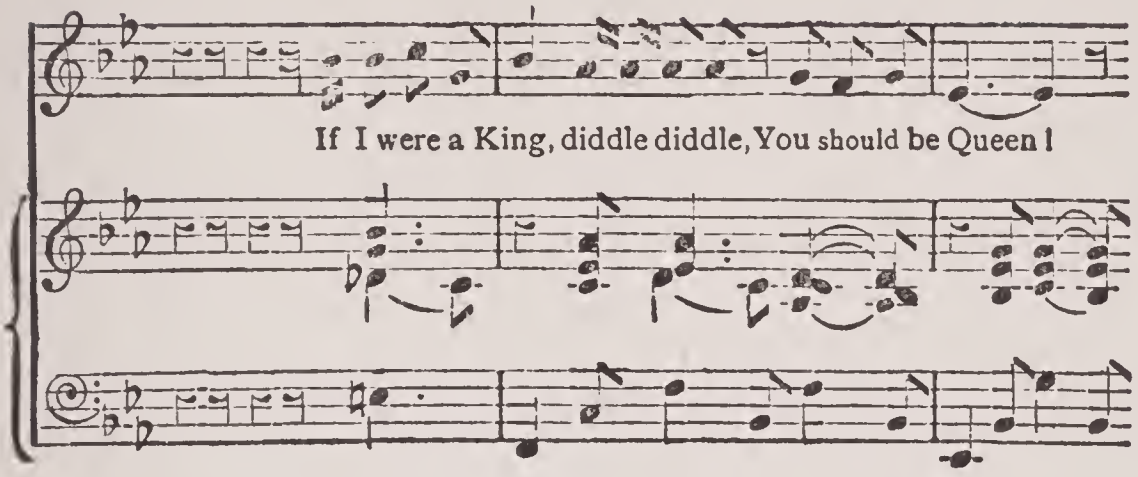
"Oh, John! John! John!—and I loved you! . . ."

.

It was lavender harvest down in Surrey. Over the heavenly blue and the heat haze and the scent that rose like incense hung a crowd of insects, intoxicated with the summer's happiness. But John Daish of Leith worked at the reaping with a savage sense of relief, and as his keen sickle ran through the stiff stalks he saw the flowers fall as if he were sacrificing a memory with them.



The foolish old nursery song!



The whicker of the wicked sickles went down the rows implacably and the poor purple heads fell like fallen hopes. There was nobody fit to crown into queenship in John Daish's heart.

CHAPTER XVI

PEACE

TWELVE months to the heart of Nature means resurrection, though to that of man it may mean a deeper death. The lavender was in full flower once more at Leith, despite the shorn clumps of last year. Sweeps of clear purple from the old potato patch up to the top of the gentle rise, it clothed John Daish's land with the glory of its rich colour, a little lighter where the wind swept over it and passed on full of the prodigal fragrance. The bees and the butterflies hung in clouds of murmuring life above the rich bloom, drowsy with sweets, glad with summer, and happy in their work, for the harvest was a good one.

It was still too early for distilling, but the men were "bunching" for Covent Garden, and the work was more complicated than the reaping of the fully ripe plants. They worked in one row—first the cutter, using his toothed sickle in rhythmical monotony; behind him the buncher, who with a practised movement made the cut stalks even against his thigh; and behind him again the tyer with a long truss of raffia hanging out of his pocket wherewith to tie the bunches. Yet other men were employed to carry the lavend r on to the headland at the end of the field, where it was

"half-dozened," or put into bundles of half a dozen bunches for sale in Covent Garden. The bunches were stowed in the van and all covered over with the archangel mats beneath which Charley had hidden herself on the return journey.

Bunching was a more popular employment than the real harvest, because it gave plenty of opportunity for talking. Bill Somers was tying the lavender that Jonah Wickham bunched, and the two could gossip as they pleased, secure in the fact that old Adam, who was their cutter, was too deaf to hear.

"I reckon we shall be cutting for the oil the week after next," said Somers, looking critically at the lavender in his hands. "The distillery won't be at work till August first week this year—maybe second."

"It orter be the last week in July," objected Jonah, tying his bunch with neater skill than might have been expected from his blunt fingers. But it was knack that made a good lavender man in all branches of the work.

"Don't you think it, mate. We haven't been as early as that for two seasons. Why, the last time we distilled at the end of July was that year the dog nearly got into the copper. I know it by that. Lord! Jack Turner and Jim was heaving out the waste, and they say it was the nearest shave they ever see!"

"The year that Charley was here, then. Ever hear any more of un?" With a curious impulse Jonah lowered his voice, and glanced over his shoulder where the tall figure of the farmer was visible at the further end of the row. John Daish was the best and most expert cutter on his own farm, and the quickest buncher and tyer as well. To-day, as it happened, he was cutting.

"No—nor anyone else," said Bill shortly in reply. "He run off again just as I always say he would. There's no training those tramp boys to any decent work. Not all the spoilin' and pettin' he got would keep him, and Mrs. Skelton will have it he took more than he brought, though there was never a question asked."

"Mrs. Skelton liked him as well as Hector does a stranger!" said Jonah with a sly laugh. "Mrs. *Skeleton*, as he used to call 'er. My! he was a cure. Take her off to the life, he cud."

"It's two years since 'e 'opped it come September," said Somers, as he bunched the lavender. "And Somebody's never bin the same since. You notice that, Jonah?"

"You go to blazes! That weren't the boy—that was his cousin's marriage with the London gentleman —Colonel Thorne."

"Some'ats changed the master's temper, any'ow. And if he wanted the young woman, why didn't he take her while he cud?"

"Maybe she wouldn't 'ave 'im," said Jonah cynically. "If a woman says 'No' to a man, it's little use putting the banns up."

The gossip suddenly altered to a closer attention to work, for John Daish was coming down the line to say something to David Abel. He carried himself, if anything, a little more firmly than he had done two years ago, and his face was no less handsome, if it had altered in some subtle fashion that Bill Somers called "temper," without meaning that the farmer was less just or more prone to anger than of yore. It was only

that he was of darker moods, more morose in his habits, less sociable even than of old, and he had never been a convivial type or fond of the society of his neighbours.

Yet in the past two years John Daish had prospered. The harvests, particularly the peppermint, had been rich, and despite the cost of building he was making certain alterations and improvements in his house that he had long had in mind. The men were of opinion that he meant to marry, if only out of pique for his cousin's jilting him after a match between them had been considered inevitable, some day. The only difficulty was that the lady was still to find, Daish having shown no preference at all for anybody in the neighbourhood and paying no suspicious visits elsewhere. He rarely went away, except on business. He stuck to his work with a steady persistence that at least justified him by results, and all the improvements in Leith farmhouse were of a bachelor kind—a new bathroom with hot and cold water laid on from the kitchen, a study for his experiments in the mixing of soils and fertilisers that seemed to his men little short of necromancy, a harness-room in place of the old shed that was considered good enough in his father's day.

The workmen had been all about the place since spring, but they were gone now and the new buildings were beginning to work themselves into the familiar picture of Leith in the men's minds. There had been no new sitting-room added to the house, such as a mistress of it might have looked for, no conservatory or greenhouse put up for such idle things as flowers,

no new glass porch to the heavy front door, which ludicrous addition to old masonry was invariably the signal of a bachelor farmer getting married. And Mrs. Skelton still reigned supreme in the kitchen, and did not feel her empire tottering, so long as she kept a certain past prejudice and dark suspicion behind locked lips.

When the familiar, primitive "gong" rang for the dinner hour, Daish lingered a little behind the men, as if to see them off the field. But there was a suggestion of aloofness about him when he followed them a few yards behind that made Somers nudge his neighbour significantly. As the farmer crossed the road to the farmhouse he met the postman, who handed him the one letter that he had to deliver.

"Morning, Master Daish," he said cheerfully, as he wheeled his bicycle round. "Grand weather for your crops."

"Yes, if we do not get rain," said Daish unemotionally. "Is this all?"

"All for Leith. Good-day, sir."

The man rode away, leaving Daish with the letter in his hand in unusual feminine writing. It was from Lillias, and he carried it with him into the house, where he went almost reluctantly to the old panelled room where his midday meal was laid. The parlour had become a haunted place, though he never said so even to his own heart—haunted with a white face and a wailing voice that spoke to him out of the shadows, whether it were night or day.

"I'm very young still," it said. "I knew evil before I ever knew good, and there was no one to tell me. . . ."

I'm going now, and I shan't come back. . . . I loved you, John!—I would have stayed with you. I loved you. . . ."

Then it was that John Daish was driven to his studies of soils and fertilisers, and worked remorselessly for the sake of working, writing the record of such work in every line round his tragic blue eyes. He winced from the sight of the table where they two had stealthily worked evening after evening, of the low recess by the fireplace where the small boyish figure had sometimes been hidden (in his worst moments he would turn his head sharply, almost expecting it to creep out), and most of all from the lavender picture that he had offered as a bribe to study, and that she had told him with so much sad meaning would never be hers! The little dazzling sketch with its atmosphere and colour was the most intolerable thing in the room. He could not bear to look at it—but it drew his eyes the moment he entered the parlour. Small wonder that he preferred his new study!

Two years since Charley went away—and only once had the vivid memory of her flashed into the sharp agony of actual encounter. He had gone to London on business just a year ago, and by some freak of fate had been obliged to make a diversion to the West End to see a man whom he had missed in the City. Then, in a quiet side street, he had come upon a crowd of people listening to a well-dressed girl singing at the kerb by the side of a legitimate street hawker. The shock of the recognition was with him still—the sound of the clear trained voice singing a rhyme of lavender—the old foolish nursery song!—


La-ven-der's blue, did-dle did-dle, La-ven-der's
green; If I were a King, did-dle did-dle, You should be
Queen! La-ven-der's blue, did-dle did-dle, La-ven-der's



He had turned from the whole scene with such hard contempt in his heart that for the minute it had been no more than a sorry exhibition to him—the stage favourite, advertising herself even in the London streets, under the guise of charity. No doubt she loved the dramatic moment and the crowd of people staring at her, since modesty or shame were unknown qualities to Miss Carlotta Edison. But sometimes since, a little gentle doubt had laid a timid hand upon the ugly memory—had tried to remind him of Charley's impulses and ungoverned nature, generous even to

extravagance. Might she not have done it out of kindness rather than self-advertisement? Would he have judged so harshly save for his own bitterness and resentment? "When you hear of me," said the wailing voice out of the shadows, "don't take it for granted that it's something bad. You'll hear plenty of lies——" Perhaps the lies had been of his own creating. But he drove the gentler thought away, and hugged his vindictiveness as though it were a virtue.

Save for that encounter he had never seen or heard of her since—he had never sought to hear. Her name must have been often enough in the papers, but he had steadily kept off such news, and she might have married or died for all he knew. He had shut his heart with the shutting of his doors that night when she went away, and would not listen to its bitter cry. But he had not succeeded in killing the love that he kept down by sheer will power, or in easing the pain of its denial. It surged up sometimes, and threatened to overwhelm him. Then it was that he kept most by himself, and his men said that his "temper had changed." It was not often, for he was a busy man and never gave himself leave to think or to soften; but he dreaded those wild hours of bruised passion as he dreaded nothing else. It was a merciful thing that no one at least had suspected the girl's sex, unless it were the intuition of his housekeeper, who could prove nothing. Even her hatred could not unmask the deception, which was known only to three people—John Daish himself, Lillias, and Colonel Thorne. Most people put down the alteration in John to Lillias'

marriage, as Jonah Wickham had done, and wanted no further explanation. He let it go at that, indifferent to their comments or pity, and was thankful.

Lillias' letter was a long one, full of small information and the things that were of importance in her daily life. She wrote seldom, but when she wrote she took it for granted that her cousin's affection was unaltered and that such happenings must be worth recording to him. John had not seen much of Lillias in the eighteen months since her marriage. He had not quarrelled with her, though he had opposed it with all the silent resentment of his knowledge of Colonel Thorne—unavailingly. The thing that he half feared of Lillias' husband—the thing that Charley had not acknowledged—stood between him and his liking for the man. He could not look on masculine lapses of virtue in the same careless spirit as in Colonel Thorne's world; they did not slip by him as they might a more robust philosopher, and he had not Lillias' touchstone of love to enable him to ignore or forgive. The horror of the possibility made a sore place still in his memory, and he had put off meeting his new kinsman, even when the child was born and he was invited to the christening. Lillias, loyal to her own people, had come down to Leith once or twice to see him, but she had gained in a wisdom that was not so much worldly as spiritual, and she did not try to force a meeting between her husband and her cousin. She had the patience to wait, but she never lost touch with John, the letter in his hand being one of the links she still patiently forged.

"I want you to see our boy—he is splendid," she

wrote. "I shall bring him to Leith this August, and show him the lavender. When are you harvesting the crop and distilling? We have been to Harrogate this year for Ted's gout. It is a gay place in spite of the treatment, and I enjoyed it. The moor air suited the baby. He got such rosy cheeks! We shall not leave London before August, because we have already had this change. But we are going to Goodwood for the races. I have a new costume of blue cloth, but I would not have anything very light because it is so extravagant. We are going to stay with some friends of Ted's near Littlehampton, and motor over. I do wish you were going, dear John. I think a change of scene is good for quiet people like you and me, more than for most. I can stand the excitement of racing much better than Ted. It seems to do me good. And you and I were always alike."

There was nothing more in the letter—there had been nothing in it all through. But that picture of Lillias in her dark-blue cloth "costume," with her beauty wakened to brilliance by the crowds and the excitement of the racecourse, struck John with forcible truth. Lillias was right about herself. Her nature was so calm that it assimilated the fever of life merely as a tonic, and what might exhaust her husband was to her a stimulant. John Daish wondered if it would affect him in the same way—if the change and the stir of an unstable world would have the power to make him less dull and heavy with work than he was becoming. He knew that he was weary with its monotony at times, and that only his indomitable will kept him

rigidly in the same groove. It was ageing him, but he did not care.

Out of the shadows came that wail again: "I can make you happy too—I know I can. You don't want a girl like your cousin Lillias, beautiful and kind though she is—she's too like you; you would bore each other. . . . I'm not like that—not beautiful and not kind—I'm wicked sometimes, and I'm never the same two days together. But I'm *myself*. And it's me that you want." . . . Was that it, perhaps? The vivid change, and contrast to his own nature? Was that the stimulant, and the excitement in his life, "never the same two days alike"? . . .

He crushed the letter in his great hands, and started up with the sweat breaking out on his forehead, for the accursed restlessness was taking hold of him again. He was even glad to get back to work in the hot, noonday sun—he could drug his trouble with work; but when work was over he must needs return to his house and its memories, though he did not this time risk the old parlour. He went to the room he had built for the pursuit of his studies, and took down a treatise on soils and fertilisers, but for once even study failed him. The restlessness was growing intolerable, and he was drawn to the window in spite of himself.

The new study looked out into the orchard, and he could leave the back of the farmhouse this way by a private door. He went out into the sunset, and walking aimlessly through the fruit-trees he made his way to the lower slopes of the lavender crop where the two-year bushes were planted out. The sun had reached the tops of the trees to his left, and beyond the smooth

velvets of the Surrey hills were bathed in light. Then all his loss came back upon him, and the tears ran down his face in his grief and anger for what one woman had made him suffer. Home, and wife, and child—she had taken them all from him with cruel little hands, and nothing could give them back. He did not forgive her—he never thought of purchasing his own peace with forgiveness; but he longed suddenly to see her again—if only as he had last year, in the sick glare of a London street, when her frightened eyes had met his in one second of grievous recognition.

Two days later Mrs. Skelton learned with secret misgivings that her master was going to take a few days' holiday before the lavender harvest, for they did not expect to distil before the first week in August, as Somers had foretold. She could not protest, she did not dare to dissuade him, but her sharp eyes noticed his worn face and she was jealous of the reason that he did not give for his unusual indulgence. He wanted a change so obviously that his choice of Worthing on the south coast was hopelessly reasonable, particularly as he had connections there. They were, indeed, Cousin Annie Jennings and her two self-assertive daughters, to whose house he had frequently been invited, and the housekeeper resented it none the less, though her suspicions of Olive and Vera were groundless. The farmer did not care about Mrs. Jennings and her daughters any more than Lillias had done, and he was not drawn to the well-known watering place by Olive's common good looks or Vera's "stylishness" (the word is strictly their mother's as applied to them).

John was going to Goodwood. He wanted to see Lillias again in her smart gown that he knew would be perfect of its kind whether it were an extravagance or no—Colonel Thorne would see to that. He told himself that she was right, and that he wanted distraction to prevent his mind brooding on things better left to oblivion. He would meet Ted Thorne too, if necessary, and shake hands as honest men might whose friendship need not be spoilt by one light woman—too light to be worth anything but scorn. He loved Lillias—he and she had been like brother and sister, and a man should stick to his kin.

Deep down in his heart's most secret place was the wild hope that he might see another face, once more, under such changed circumstances that perhaps he might find that he was cherishing a false image—that the thing he loved was nothing, did not exist, and that he was once more free of the torture of that wailing voice and the strong attraction of his little Lavender Lad with the dual personality. He almost persuaded himself, with feverish haste, that he would have been disillusioned by the meeting last year had he had the courage to linger longer, to look at and listen to her more closely. If he saw her at Goodwood it would complete the cure. He had been to race-meetings before, with his father. He remembered, years ago, seeing a celebrated actress at one, with the paint on her face and a wonderful hat with ostrich feathers. To his boy's fancy she had been rather beautiful and dreadful; but the old man had said something so contemptuous as not to bear recording. It was a likely place in which to meet a favourite of the Variety

stage—a girl who must go to all social gatherings open to her class, if only as an advertisement. . . .

Daish did not stay with the Jennings in Worthing, as Mrs. Skelton supposed he would do—did not even go to see them in their hot little house in one of the suburban roads that intersect the outskirts of the place. He went to one of the smaller hotels, and got a seat on one of the motor char-â-bancs that took people out to the race-meeting day by day. Lillias had merely said that she and her husband were going to Goodwood from the neighbourhood of Littlehampton, but had not mentioned whether they would be there for all four days or only one. John, however, booked for the Cup Day as being the greatest attraction, though he had not written and told Lillias of his intention of being present. It was a long, hot drive, through scenery that did not appeal to his dull eyes, their sight being turned inwards; and the noise and vibration made him weary before they reached the course. He did not much care. He had abandoned all pretence of pleasure, to himself at least, and stuck to his purpose with the same doggedness that he had brought to his work of late. It seemed as if his will only was left to him, while all incentive to life had gone. That dull sense of pain, and wrong, and being unable to forgive, robbed him of peace and pleasure alike, and yet he brooded on his wrong with morbid persistence.

He had not been to a big race meeting for so many years—not since his father's death—that the noise and the crowd confused him at first as it might the simplest yokel. But he set his steady face to the solving of this problem as he might a piece of new

machinery, and somehow it bore him towards the stands—the heart of the glad riot. Somewhere in that gay crowd might be Charley, and at any moment they might come face to face. Sometimes he turned in fancy from the encounter with a kind of cold disgust like pride grown white hot, and sometimes he hoped fiercely that they might meet if it caused her any shock or pain such as he had seen in her face last year —it was then that the devil had the best grip on him, and his own face was as a wicked mask. It did not strike him that his purpose made him remarkable any more than his personal beauty, but people turned to stare at him as at a side show. He heard an American call him "a real lovely feller!" and did not recognise it for himself; an Englishwoman say, "What a handsome man!—he is almost beautiful"—and looked vaguely round to see this Adonis.

He walked up to the little box office and asked for a pass to the stand. That much at least he understood: that he must pay to reach the better class spectators, Lillias and her husband—possibly Carlotta Edison. He did not pay to go into the paddock. He would have been even more out of place there, and the horses did not interest him—he was not betting. They gave him a round pass, like a label, to hang on his coat, and thus decorated he was free to be a fool amongst other fools—or so he thought in the bitterness of his heart.

He was conscious of the smell of trampled turf peculiar to race meetings, as soon as he got on to the lawns—the poor bruised grass, that was as a friend to him!—and of the curious smile on every face, a smile

that had nothing to do with enjoyment but was always looking for it. Everyone was feverishly *expecting* pleasure, but it never seemed to reach them. They wore that smile above money losses, and the boredom of talking to friends in their party for hours, and the physical weariness of feet that stood too long and walked too far, from the lawns to the stands, from the refreshment tents to the enclosure where car or horse vehicle might be awaiting them.

Yet he also walked—up and down, to and fro, looking at the painted faces that might so easily be Charley's—that could not be Lillias'—and the barely clothed bodies of the women who seemed almost indecent to him. The lawns were packed, and the enclosure below the stands was full of hoarse voices and the push of human bodies trying to reach the rails where the bookmakers hung, shouting monotonously, without personal interest beyond the pursuit of their trade. They were all members of Tattersalls and would pay the winning minority; but they knew, as the bank knows at Monte Carlo, that the majority must lose. So they made their living.

The din and the heat struck in Daish's ears and nostrils, driving him mad. He smelt the trampled turf with the fine, clean sense of his own meadows, and pushing his way almost roughly through the crowd fled to the stands. Up and up, past the people sitting under cover, until a further flight led him out into the upper air where he could at least breathe, unchoked by humanity. He climbed from step to step and seat to seat until he reached the highest row——

And then, a miracle. Below him was the tiny enclosure with the hoarse bookies a million miles away, and the tiny green racecourse where the lean horses were beginning to canter past with switching tails, and the lawns where the tiny people were crowding to the rails in their gaudy gowns and wrinkleless coats. But beyond was surely the fairest landscape in all God's earth, hazy with sun and dappled with shadow, a happy country that was not spoiled with cultivation, but allowed to rise and fall in all the glory of summer leafage, one green within another, and the blue sky at the end of all.

Nobody had told him that Goodwood has the most beautiful setting of any racecourse in England, or that Goodwood Park is one of the most lovely things that riches have so far guarded against the desecration of hard necessity. He stood and gasped, forgetting himself, and Charley, and the strange crowd around him, for the moment ; seeing nothing but those slopes opening and closing one behind the other with fresh vistas of green. He had thought his own homestead beautiful, the cultivation of his lavender, the arable land and pasture in coloured sections ; but he saw the limitation of all this as against the glory of a rich man's pleasure-ground. His eyes lost themselves in the blue distance, came back to plunge through the deep verdure of plantations and the splendour of unbroken slopes, until they grew hot with tears, and the cruelty in his heart seemed loosening its hold for the first time this two years. The little crowd below, the magnificent horses (so much nobler than the humanity for which they made sport !) the

trivial game at which everyone seemed playing, was all as a breath upon the glass compared with the permanence of that great landscape that folded it in so quietly and patiently. And he too, with his vindictive desire to wound because he had been wounded, seemed suddenly mean of purpose and unimportant. For the bitterness of his mood was slipping from him without his will, and he filled his lungs with a deep breath of the free air as if he drew in new life.

"There is a record crowd on Trundle Hill," said a lady standing beside him. "Nobody has ever seen so many vehicles."

John turned his racing glasses on the hill with its motley gathering spread out to the left, as if the cheaper public were children grouped in one of his own fields, feeling that even the people lacked dignity in this beer-bottle, paper-bag desecration of Nature. Then he looked at his neighbours. Both of them were women whose middle-age had the retention of youth and a certain *cachet* that marked them as well-bred. They were speaking to each other, and paid no apparent attention to him.

"I'm sure there's a record crowd in the stands," said the second woman with a little laugh. "Phew! how hot it was down below! I have seen nobody who looked becomingly cool—except Mrs. Thorne."

"How beautiful she is! No wonder Ted Thorne is proud of her, despite his unexpected marriage. It was the wildest adventure for a man of his type."

"It seems to have worked very well, nevertheless. She acts like a blessed balm to his nervous excitability.

I do like the way she just lays her hand on his arm and smiles at him when he fumes! The fret goes out of him exactly as it might out of a child that is comforted."

"The fret would go out of most men if Mrs. Thorne smiled at them. She is too perfectly lovely to make even women jealous, because it is hopeless to think of rivalling her. And they have tastes in common—she plays bridge even better than he does, which is saying a good deal!—and she really enjoys this sort of thing"—the speaker nodded to the course and the crowds.

"I think she knows a good deal about horses. She told me once, with the simplest manner, that her father had been head man in some small training stables before he married her mother, but that after his marriage he settled down to farming. No doubt he still bred horses, and took an interest in them, and the girl must have been brought up to understand it."

"That is what one likes in her—that she disguises nothing. She wears her beauty like an unconscious crown, but I believe she thinks that it is Ted Thorne who has made her a queen by marrying her."

"I saw the younger Thornes with them just now. How absurdly alike Ted and Eddie are!"

"Oh, they ought to be father and son rather than uncle and nephew. Mary knows, at least, exactly what her husband will look like when he is Colonel Thorne's age."

"Alike in character too——"

John suddenly became aware that he was listening,

not as an uninterested auditor, and that he had no right to do so. He passed the two ladies with a murmured apology, and made his way slowly to the stairs again, followed by their instant and alert scrutiny, though a minute before they had seemed unaware of him.

"Talk of beauty!" said the first speaker. "My dear, I never saw such a face. It is just rugged enough to escape the sickliness of Greek perfection. And what colouring!"

"It is a little like Lillias Thorne's, oddly enough. Hasn't she a farmer cousin? Could that be the man?"

John Daish was going in search of Lillias and Colonel Thorne now that he knew them to be at hand. He felt that he could meet them now with nothing but kindliness. He had forgiven Thorne his part in the sordid tragedy that had darkened his own life, at least. As he came into the covered portion of the stand there arose a hoarse cheering without, which heralded the King. Daish could not see him come in, but he felt the onrush of his presence, and he moved nearer to the private boxes between him and the royal stand, half forced by the crowd, half with the intention of looking past the boxes to catch a glimpse of his Majesty.

Then, suddenly, he was back in his own lavender fields, irresistibly carried there by that strongest aid to memory, scent. For someone was using the essence, and it came up into his nostrils pure and aromatic in contrast to the grosser scents that exhaled from other women's gowns. He was standing close to the private boxes belonging to people whose names appeared over

them on a card, and looking straight in front of him he saw Charley.

It was somebody with a title who owned this box, and there were several people in it, but his eyes declined to take them in, or anyone, save the one face he knew now that he had come to see. She was no less extravagantly dressed than other women, but because she was Charley it did not seem to matter. Her thin, dark-blue draperies were curiously intersected with fawn and gold, and her slender legs and feet were left quite visible by the short skirt; but she did not wear the mouse-colour or soiled white affected by so many women—those little feet were encased in dark blue shoes, and the silk stockings were dark blue also. Her arms were bare above the elbow, the short sleeves clear and dark against the skin that had lost all trace of sunburn, and her dear cropped head was covered by a strange satin cap with two ears that made her look like a freakish faun. She sat sideways in her chair, swinging her foot, and close to the barrier that divided her friends' box from the more general stand. A greater metamorphosis than this *chic* lady from the ragged little Lavender Lad could hardly be conceived. It struck him more than it had done last year, when he had had but a passing glimpse of her, singing at the edge of the kerb in the London street. And yet it was no greater than the one that took place every one of her nights and days, when she passed from her impersonations at the Halls to her private character of one of the most talked-of women in London.

There was something subtly tragic in the thin, down-bent face, and the curious crowd, recognising her,

might well say, "Here is a girl with a story!" But John Daish was no longer capable of criticism or of noting the changes in her as he stood so near to her and looked with strained blue eyes at the face and figure that were so familiar and so unfamiliar. The breath of the lavender stole up to him from her dress or her person, he did not know how, and they two were in the fields together again, with the sweep of scented purple ruffled by the wind, and the bees and the butterflies hanging murmurous over the flowers that seemed to diffuse as much colour as perfume. . . . Only now she was a woman, and no rough lad to puzzle him with her secret power to draw his heart away.

She looked up in a minute and saw him, as if his fixed regard compelled her—a beautiful, blond giant, looking at her out of a mist of faces that did not matter, his only distinct. He saw the strangled cry in her throat, and the passion and pain in the great black eyes—saw her little thin hands grip themselves until the polished nails must have cut into the flesh. She remembered the meeting of last year, and the lash of his contempt still made her flinch as if she expected it again. The distress in her face was so pitiful that he almost held out his hands as if to reassure a child. Was it *this* that he had done—to hurt her so much that she was still afraid after two years had passed—afraid of her grief and its memory, and of his hard judgment—his little love, with her undisciplined heart given into his keeping to spurn and torture? They had never even kissed, but his lips kissed hers, as it were, across the space between them, so that the blood sprang suddenly to her face without cause or reason, as though

a god had touched it . . . and then he knew he had forgiven her by the relief that came upon him with the loss of his own strife.

For there can be no peace without forgiveness.

THE END

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

THE FAMOUS SEA STORIES OF

HERMAN MELVILLE

Each one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated (except as otherwise noted) $1.90

MOBY DICK; Or, The White Whale.

TYPEE. A Real Romance of the South Sea.

OMOO. A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas; a sequel to TYPEE.

WHITE JACKET; Or, The World on a Man-of-War.

MARDI; and a Voyage Thither. $2.00.

THE recent centenary of Herman Melville created renewed interest in his famous sea stories.

Melville's power of describing and investing with romance, scenes and incidents witnessed and participated in by himself was unequalled. These stories, though written more than fifty years ago, are more attractive than ever, and are daily growing in popularity.

"Melville wove human element and natural setting into recitals which aroused the enthusiasm of critics and sent a thrill of delight through the reading public when first published, and which both for form and matter have ever since held rank as classics in the literature of travel."—*Boston Herald.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 BEACON STREET BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

JARVIS

By REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

Author of "My Heart and Stephanie," "The House of Bondage," etc.
Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

TWO and twenty years have passed since JARVIS —then with unintended challenge (so Mr. Kauffman assures us in the preface) called "Jarvis of Harvard"—first saw the light. The red sun of the Victorian era was still warm; the delightful madness of the century's end held us all, and none more firmly than the young. And so Jarvis was a "devil of a fellow" in the year of his publication. He created a literary panic, divided a university, shocked one public and delighted another. One newspaper man called his story "a psychological study of the 'scarlet man'"; the Boston *Transcript's* reviewer intimated that the author ought to be "ashamed to have his name on the title page" and then sent a marked copy of the review to the author's uncle, to whom the book was boyishly dedicated! Why, then, the present re-issue?

Because the story has something to justify it and possesses vitality. People want it as a picture of youth at a period of the world that will never be duplicated. JARVIS appeals because his is an enduring type of the young man seeking, though blindly, an ideal — trying, though by mistaken methods, to make his own synthesis of life as too many find it. These possibilities argue against changing one word of the text, and so, in response to numberless requests, the St. Botolph Society reissue Mr. Kauffman's first book—JARVIS.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

The Heart that Knows

By CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

Author of "Earth's Enigmas," "Kindred of the Wild," "Barbara Ladd," etc.
Cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.75

THIS is a story of the fisher and sailor folk of the Tantramar marsh country about the head of the Bay of Fundy—a region of violent tides, of vast, fertile salt meadows fenced in from the tides by interminable barriers of dike—and of strenuous, adventurous people who occupy themselves with all the romantic business of the sea. The passions of these people are vehement, like their tides, but their natures have much of the depth, richness, and steadfastness which characterize their exhaustless meadows. The action turns upon the wisdom of the heart in discerning truth and love where mere reason has seen but gross betrayal.

"A novel of singularly effective strength, luminous in literary color, rich in its passionate yet tender drama."—*New York Globe.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

The Call of the South

By ROBERT LEE DURHAM

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

AN absorbing and intensely realistic story dealing with the race problem in this country. The principal theme is the danger to society from the increasing miscegenation of the black and white races, and the encouragement it receives in the social amenities extended to negroes of distinction by persons prominent in politics, philanthropy and educational endeavor. The moral of the story is not flung at the reader's head, but is absorbed unconsciously, as the author (a Southern lawyer by the way) forecasts future possible events, because of the intermingling of the blacks and whites socially, in fascinating and dramatic manner. The force of the book is tremendous. In dramatic power it equals Tolstoi's "Resurrection."

"The speech of Rutledge before the Senate is splendid. By itself it is one of the best arguments against social equality that has ever appeared. It should be printed in a pamphlet by itself and given world-wide distribution."—*Louisville Courier-Journal.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

WORKS OF
Gabriele D'Annunzio

SIGNOR D'ANNUNZIO is known throughout the world as a poet and a dramatist, but above all as a novelist, for it is in his novels that he is at his best. In poetic thought and graceful expression he has few equals among the writers of the day.

He is engaged on a most ambitious work — nothing less than the writing of nine novels which cover the whole field of human sentiment. This work he has divided into three trilogies, and five of the nine books have been published. It is to be regretted that other labors have interrupted the completion of the series.

"This book is realistic. Some say that it is brutally so. But the realism is that of Flaubert, and not of Zola. There is no plain speaking for the sake of plain speaking. Every detail is justified in the fact that it illuminates either the motives or the actions of the man and woman who here stand revealed. It is deadly true. The author holds the mirror up to nature, and the reader, as he sees his own experiences duplicated in passage after passage, has something of the same sensation as all of us know on the first reading of George Meredith's 'Egoist.' Reading these pages is like being out in the country on a dark night in a storm. Suddenly a flash of lightning comes and every detail of your surroundings is revealed."— *Review of "The Triumph of Death" in the New York Evening Sun.*

The volumes published are as follows. Each 1 vol., library 12mo, cloth, $1.75

THE ROMANCES OF THE ROSE

THE CHILD OF PLEASURE (Il Piacere)
THE INTRUDER (L'Innocente)
THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH (Il Trionfo della Morte)

THE ROMANCES OF THE LILY

THE MAIDENS OF THE ROCKS (Le Vergini delle Rocce)

THE ROMANCES OF THE POMEGRANATE

THE FLAME OF LIFE (Il Fuoco)

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

The Making of a Saint

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Author of
"The Moon and Sixpence," "Of Human Bondage," etc.
Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

SOMERSET MAUGHAM has attained literary fame and popularity with the reading public equalled by few English writers. His plays are drawing audiences in every city; his books are always among the best sellers; so that the St. Botolph Society shows excellent judgment in selecting his THE MAKING OF A SAINT for the first publication to carry the new imprint.

"THE MAKING OF A SAINT is a romance of mediæval Italy. None can resent the frankness and apparent brutality of the scenes through which the hero and his companions of both sexes are made to pass, and many will yield ungrudging praise to the author's vital handling of the truth."— *Boston Herald.*

"An exceedingly strong story of original motive and design. . . . The scenes are imbued with a spirit of frankness . . . and in addition there is a strong dramatic flavor."—*Philadelphia Press.*

"A sprightly tale abounding in adventures, and redolent with the spirit of mediæval Italy."—*Brooklyn Times.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

The Sands *of* Pleasure

By FILSON YOUNG

Author of "The Happy Motorist," "Venus and Cupid, an Impression," etc.
Cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.65

"THE consciousness of doing something wrong would make it ugly."
"Morality is only an underbred substitute for decency."

These two quotations from THE SANDS OF PLEASURE are indicative of this unusual story and the more unusual point of view. "I had a story to tell," wrote the author. "I have told it as well as I knew how—that ought to be enough, and more than enough, for me to say about this book. But some have decreed, with what wisdom I do not pretend to measure, that this subject and that, very urgent though they may be in the life of man, shall not be written or read about in books designed merely for the entertainment of his mind. I have disobeyed this decree, and cast a great part of my tale in a region held to be out of bounds—Bohemia."

It *is* a story of Bohemia, but written with the healthy enthusiasm of youth for all there is in life. Much of the greatest the world has produced in art and literature has been born of the Montmarte and the Quartier Latin, but little of worth has been written about them. Murger's "La Vie de Boheme" was a great romance. Here is a fine, realistic novel.—"*Nè creator nè creatura mai—fu senza amore.*"

"It is tense, strong, narrative, and descriptive writing of a sort that is wholly admirable."—*London Graphic.*

"Mr. Young blends the artistic with the realistic and conjures up scenes which can never be forgotten by the reader, and no greater praise than that could be given to a writer."—*Western Morning News, Plymouth, England.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

Omar, the Tentmaker

A ROMANCE OF OLD PERSIA

By NATHAN HASKELL DOLE

Author of "The Spell of Switzerland," "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Multivariorum Edition," etc. Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.65

"'OMAR, THE TENTMAKER' is real literature, and the fame of the book should grow with the years. Had the writer never produced anything save this volume his life would have been well worth while, for this romance of old Persia is a thing of beauty and a joy forever." —*Vicksburg Evening Post.*

Captain Fracasse

Translated from the French of Gautier

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated with ten illustrations by Victor A. Searles and an elaborate jacket with an illustration in full color by Frank T. Merrill, $1.75

"THERE is a real satisfaction in turning to this genuine old fantasy of love, adventure and heroism. It is a belated blossom of the romantic period in fiction—not a forced and artificial bloom put forth in response to popular demand." —*St. Paul Pioneer Press.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 BEACON STREET BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

PETTY TROUBLES OF MARRIED LIFE

By HONORÉ DE BALZAC

Edited, with Introduction by J. Walker McSpadden
Cloth, large 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

"MARRIAGE is not an institution of nature. The family in the East is entirely different from the family in the West. Man is the servant of Nature, and the institutions of Society are grafts, not spontaneous growths of Nature. Laws are made to suit manners, and manners vary. Marriage must therefore undergo the gradual development towards perfection to which all human affairs submit."

These words, pronounced in the presence of the Conseil d'Etat by Napoleon, during the discussion of the civil code, produced a profound impression on Balzac—universally conceded to be the greatest novelist of France if not of the world—and suggested to his mind the writing of this "history of human thought" in which he sets forth matters which represent what everybody thinks about marriage, but no one dares to say. The popular demand for Balzac's works has had a tremendous impetus within the last few years, and the re-issue of THE PHYSIOLOGY OF MARRIAGE, at this time, when America in particular and the world in general "views with alarm" the prevalency of divorce, has heightened interest in this greatest of all works on the fascinating subject of marriage.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

Edward Barry

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUTH SEAS

By LOUIS BECKE

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.65.

THE rediscovery of Herman Melville, mariner and mystic, together with the marked popularity of South Sea Island travel and fiction at the present time, makes it timely to call attention to another writer of sea tales, of almost equal merit, Louis Becke.

George Louis Becke, born in New South Wales, was a trader in the South Sea Islands from 1870 to 1893. When he turned to writing his fame was instantaneous. He still remains the brightest figure in Australian letters. His style is that of Stevenson, and his narratives, many of which have the intensity of autobiography, and the authoritativeness of personal experience, are as vivid as Conrad's. His books are born of the South Seas they represent.

EDWARD BARRY is the story of a young man, mate of a small brig, engaged in the pearl fisheries. Strong and even tragic, as is the novel in the main, the love and devotion of a woman is portrayed with delicate feeling. Nowhere does drama and romance flourish as in the South Seas, and Louis Becke is one of its most appealing writers.

"For a rousing, absorbing and withal a truthful tale of the South Seas, commend me to Louis Becke. EDWARD BARRY is one of the best, and the love romance that runs through it will be appreciated by every one."— *Philadelphia North American.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

TWO POWERFUL NOVELS BY

GUSTAV FRENSSEN

Each one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, per volume, $1.75.

JÖRN UHL. *Translated by F. S. Delmer.*

"JÖRN UHL" is the most powerful story of modern German life, and was the literary sensation of Europe. Over two hundred thousand copies were sold within eighteen months of issue. The story touches upon many of the social and ethical problems of the day. This novel stands as a book of real worth, a sincere criticism of life, and a poet's interpretation of the life of man and the wonder of the universe of God.

"This is Mr. Frenssen's best-known work, and one that could not have too many readers in this country. The simple and fine story of Jörn's efforts to save the family acres has a measure of philosophy and poetic vision that lift it quite above any other study in recent times."—*New York Evening Post.*

HOLYLAND. *Translated by M. A. Hamilton.*

THE exclusive authorized translation of "Holyland," pronounced by competent critics to be the greatest novel of modern times. The scenes and characters are drawn from among the humble sea-faring folk who live on the borders of the German Ocean.

"A remarkable novel, judged by whatever standard, one proving that a really great novel knows no one country alone, but must approach the universal in appeal."—*New York Globe.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

What Allah Wills

A ROMANCE OF MOROCCO

By IRWIN L. GORDON, F. R. G. S.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated by William Van Dresser, $1.65.

"A STORY of love and adventure, full of the quivering atmosphere of the Moorish East."— *New York World.*

"The high purpose of 'What Allah Wills' lifts it out of the realm of ordinary romance and stamps it as the most important novel of the Moslem world since Robert Hichens' 'Garden of Allah.' "— *Philadelphia Public Ledger.*

Servitude

By IRENE OSGOOD

Cloth decorative 12mo, $1.65.

"THE author shows a great gift of originality and dramatic insight. It is a story that will hold firmly the attention of even the veteran novel reader to the end." — *Brooklyn Eagle.*

"The novel teems with romance. Few books unite such a pleasing style with so great a wealth of exciting romance and interesting adventure." — *Chicago Record-Herald.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

The Mysteries of Paris

By EUGENE SUE

Illustrated with thirty-two etchings, six volumes, cloth, gilt top, per set $12.00

ALTHOUGH many years have elapsed since the death of Eugene Sue, no fitting edition of this great author's masterpiece has ever been published; and yet he stands today the third member of the great triumvirate of French authors who not only did much for the literature of France, but did their share toward revolutionizing many old ideas. If choice of the three greatest French novels were made, the selection would undoubtedly consist of "Les Miserables," "The Three Musketeers," and "The Mysteries of Paris."

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

Celebrated Crimes

By ALEXANDER DUMAS

New edition in four volumes, cloth, gilt top, with many illustrations, etchings and duogravures from rare prints and from original drawings by Edmund H. Garrett. With an introduction by Nathan Haskell Dole, and complete index, $10.00.

THIS edition presents for the first time, in a uniform set, the complete text of Dumas' wonderful masterpiece, as it includes CELEBRATED CRIMES OF THE RUSSIAN COURT, translated by Mickael Gortshakov. The author was scrupulously accurate, giving every incident according to the evidence obtained by his exhaustive research and the translating and editing have been done with skill and judgment, the result being a work of merit, not only as literature but as history.

The romantic portions of the history of Europe, from Russia to Scotland, are given as only Dumas could write. The work includes the crimes and intrigues, the *causes celebres*, of the royal courts of Europe, portrayed in the most remarkable manner.

"The reader will gain many powerful impressions of the secrets of court life, of the evils of absolute autocracy and its inevitable degeneration . . . Alive with interest . . . not a dull page in it."— *Brooklyn Eagle.*

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

LOVE AFFAIRS OF GREAT MUSICIANS

By RUPERT HUGHES

Author of "Contemporary American Composers," etc.

Cloth decorative, 8vo, profusely illustrated, $4.00

A COLLECTION of romances of the world's most noted musicians. From Beethoven, never under banns, but always in love, to Bach, the very much married, the home-maker; from Tschaikovski, who was mortally afraid of his own wife, to Handel, who cared for no woman, but terrorized many—these love affairs, and scores of others, make up a chronicle of both musical and amatory interest.

A partial list of the chapters includes:

Bach, the Patriarch
Gluck, the Domestic
Rousseau, the Confessor
Beethoven: The Great Bumblebee
Von Weber—the Rake Reformed
Piccinni, the Amiable
The Felicities of Mendelssohn
Papa and Mama Haydn
Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck
Musicians as Lovers

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ST. BOTOLPH SOCIETY
53 Beacon Street Boston, Massachusetts

Odes from the Divan of Hafiz

By RICHARD LeGALLIENNE
Author of
"The Quest of the Golden Girl," etc.

One volume, decorative boards $3.00
The same, Persian ooze leather, decorative . 5.00

MR. RICHARD LeGALLIENNE'S rendering of "The Odes of Hafiz," as in the case of his paraphrase of Omar Khayyam, has been made from literal prose versions of the poet, supplemented by his own fancy. While he has kept as closely as he deems necessary to his original, his aim, as before, has been to make English poetry, rather than a joyless shadow of a great classic. He offers this rendering in the first place as poetry, in the second as translation; but at the same time his aim has been, as faithfully as in him lies, truly to interpret the great Persian poet to English readers, so that the total result of his endeavor is really — if not literally — Hafiz.

"Of all the renderings of 'The Odes of Hafiz' which we have seen, Mr. LeGallienne's is by all odds the best adapted to give the English reader an adequate idea of the poetry of Hafiz."—*Literary Digest.*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

0002323516A